

Abstract

The story of the famous saboteur and intelligence officer I. G. Starinov "Not a prisoner, but a partisan" tells about the fate of the crew of a Soviet bomber, shot down during a combat mission over enemy territory in 1944.

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Ilya Starinov

Not a prisoner, but a partisan

Prologue

In 1967, the author of this book managed to stay for almost a month visiting the People's Hero of Yugoslavia, Major General Ivan Harish. The meeting took place 30 years after joint participation in the anti-fascist struggle in Spain.

Ivan Harish left Yugoslavia as a young man and worked in Argentina, where he learned to speak Spanish. Two years later, fate brought him to Canada, where he mastered English and French. At the end of 1936 he arrived in Spain. In

early January 1937, he joined the partisan formation commanded by Domingo Ungria. He quickly mastered the basics of organization and tactics of partisan operations, mastered the ability to inflict damage on the enemy, preserving and increasing his forces. In the formation of Domingo Ungrii, Ivan Harish went from my translator to adviser to the sabotage brigade of the 14th partisan corps. When the Spanish Republic fell, Ivan Harish was interned in France. When France fell and the Germans attacked the Soviet Union, Ivan Harish fled the camp and reached Yugoslavia through Germany and Austria. Here he organized a small sabotage group and in September 1941, with the help of a makeshift mine, derailed a military train from a high embankment opposite the village where the Ustashe lived (Croats who assisted the Germans). During the war, the sabotage group of I. Harish turned into a partisan detachment, and then into a partisan formation, which inflicted significant damage on the Nazis. The exploits of Ivan Harish were highly appreciated by the people. He was awarded the title of General and People's Hero of Yugoslavia. In our conversations with him, Ivan Harish told me that more

than a dozen American pilots, whose planes were shot down over the territory of Yugoslavia, Hungary and Romania, having landed behind enemy lines, went to the location of units of the People's Liberation Army of Yugoslavia. This was facilitated by the fact that the pilots of the downed aircraft had maps and were well prepared for operations in the occupied territory.

Chapter

1 Landing

At the end of October 1944, in the morning in the small but picturesque Hungarian town of Szeged, piercing air raid signals were heard. There was an ever-increasing rumble of engines of Soviet aircraft flying from the west. The soldiers and officers of the headquarters of the German Army Nskoy hurried to the shelters. Planes flew to the

side, but there was no end. Outside squads heard the hysterical rumble of the engines of a noticeably descending aircraft. Suddenly, beams of searchlights pierced the sky and, crossing, lit up a lonely car. Tracer bullets streaked towards the plane. It seemed that they were penetrating the airship, and it was flying, descending, as if it was already indifferent to both searchlights and tracer bullets.

Barely reaching the railway junction, the plane fell on the cars, and a fire broke out. A few minutes later, when the fiery tongues engulfed and devoured the trains of one park, fountains of flame suddenly flared up almost in the center of the station tracks of the junction. The fiery tongues reached the ammo train.

Explosions began, sometimes weak, sometimes strong. They seemed to put out the fire, but soon even larger flames began to appear again, and the entire railway junction turned into a huge conflagration. There was a shootout

on the outskirts of the city, but soon everyone calmed down, only cars were sent to extinguish the fire.

The command of the garrison did not immediately learn that during a Soviet air raid on military facilities in the Budapest area, one of the aircraft was badly damaged by anti-aircraft artillery fire. The navigator, Lieutenant Mikhail Ogurtsov, was wounded in the chest by fragments of shells and died, one of the two engines and a radio station were disabled, fuel was leaking from a broken tank. On-board mechanic

technician-lieutenant Ivan Dobryakov, a master of all trades, did everything possible to reach his own on one motor,

but that one was damaged and it was impossible to squeeze out the full power.

Realizing the impossibility of returning to the base, the commander of the ship, Captain Semyon Petrovich Buntsev, made a decision: the crew to leave the plane with parachutes, and send the damaged combat vehicle to the nearest major railway junction of the enemy.

The crew complied with the order, and everyone left the plane. Captain he was the last to jump, when the searchlights were already piercing the sky.

"This afternoon, fellow soldiers learn that the plane of Captain Buntsev did not return to the base. The fate of the crew is unknown. Yes! Where is now the strong man, "jack of all trades" Ivan Mikhailovich Dobryakov, where is the co-pilot, artist by nature, Anatoly Temkin, flight radio operator Olga Kretova? - thought the commander of the ship, descending with a parachute.

Chapter

2 Alone Behind Enemy Lines

Dobryakov was lucky enough to land unnoticed in a large garden. Assembling the parachute, the onboard mechanic gave conditional sound signals, but there was no answer. Voices were heard in the street, someone was talking, someone was walking, loudly tapping with forged heels.

Suddenly, gunfire broke out nearby. Dobryakov's heart skipped a beat.

"Have they really noticed one of ours," he thought, and, hiding his parachute under a bush, he quickly ran to where the shots had just come from. Running out into

the street, Dobryakov almost came face to face with two gray figures in helmets that seemed to have grown out of the ground. Decided in fractions of a second. The enemy soldiers did not expect a meeting, and the appearance of the pilot stunned them. Dobryakov was ahead of them. Before the Nazis came to their senses, he fired one after another two short bursts from the machine gun. As if knocked down, without a cry, the gray figures fell on the pavement and all around was quiet. The mechanic wanted to run across the street, but stopped and dragged the corpses of the Nazis one by one into the garden, from which he had just left.

"It will be more correct, they won't find it right away," the mechanic reasoned and, taking three grenades, ran across the street, climbed over a stone fence and began to make his way through the garden to where he heard the shooting. He often stopped, listened, gave prearranged sound signals, but no one responded, and someone else's speech was heard in the distance. Suddenly there was

a strong explosion, then a somewhat weaker one. "Is it really at the railway junction," thought Dobryakov. These distant explosions, and only now he noticed the reflection of the glow of the fire, visibly cheered up the mechanic. He walked slowly and carefully through the garden, still hoping to find his own, imitating at times

the prearranged signal - two barks, but in vain. Approaching the outer fence of the garden, the pilot stopped. It was getting light. Two fire engines and t

wagon with soldiers, and Dobryakov stood alone and looked at them from behind a high stone fence.

What to do? In the city, apparently, there are many enemy troops, and he is alone. And, surveying the surroundings, the mechanic stopped his attention on a dilapidated two-story building. Apparently, a large-caliber bomb hit the house, and one wall of it collapsed, exposing the preserved furnishings of the rooms. On the second floor, near the internal wall pierced by fragments, there were a piano and a sofa. In the basement, under the undestroyed part of the house, a bright light was breaking through the dark curtains of the window. Dobryakov decided to hide in the ruins of the house. Hiding among the plantations, unnoticed by anyone, he crawled up to the house, through a half-blocked window he disappeared into the basement under the destroyed part, where there were no signs of the presence of people.

Finding himself in the basement, Dobryakov breathed in the sour smell of spoiled vegetables, mixed with a nasty mouse stink. Something stirred in the darkness, a squeak was heard. The mechanic stopped at the window and listened. A faint light penetrated the basement through a half-blocked window, and when his eyes got used to the twilight, the flight engineer went along the wall to inspect his shelter. In the basement there were a lot of vegetables in barrels, in bulk on racks and on the floor. On one rack, he found apples. Most of them had gone bad, but Dobryakov picked out a few by touch and quenched his thirst. Continuing his reconnaissance in the darkness, he felt for the door, but it did not open, apparently, it was closed or littered from the outside. Having familiarized himself with the basement, Dobryakov again went to the window. Explosions were heard from afar, and sometimes separate shots and short bursts were heard very close. Dobryakov could not believe that he was

left alone behind enemy lines. He kept peering into the garden, listening, waiting for something and thinking about where his friends in arms were now: Temkin, Kretova.

As a precaution, he decided to fill up the window so that an uninvited guest would not use it and carefully pulled several bricks towards it. He left only small cracks and through them for a very long time watched what was being done in the garden.

Chapter

3 In the clutches of enemy intelligence

Dobryakov did not know that the crew commander Anatoly Temkin was not far away in the mansion of the Germans. The

events experienced by Temkin took place with such speed, as if in an action-adventure movie. Leap into the dark. The jerk of the opened parachute. Landing directly on an enemy patrol on the outskirts of the city. Like a pack of angry dogs, eight Nazis, almost simultaneously with a cry, rushed at one paratrooper and

grabbed him.

Glancing with an angry glance at the prisoner and his soldiers, the commander suggested that one unprepossessing soldier take off his fur boots, the fat man to take the fur jacket, and he himself took away the prisoner's watch.

The corporal and four soldiers led Temkin into the city. The appearance of the prisoner was unsightly: his hands were tied behind his back, a tunic without a belt, riding breeches and socks without shoes.

The escorts led the prisoner past a dilapidated house, in which the rooms exposed by the explosion were visible, turned a corner and approached a high white stone fence. The sentry called the duty officer, and he let them into the yard. They were stopped at the preserved beautiful mansion, and the corporal left to report. Soon he came out together with a full, tall man in a raincoat and ordered to bring the prisoner. Temkin was led into a room where, as if warming up, a lean, slender, tall officer with the rank of major was walking around, with a cigarette in his mouth. A flabby Hitlerite with a large, balding head was sitting at the table. His mouth was half open, his lower lip hung down, revealing large yellow teeth, his eyes looked angrily at the newcomer, and so angrily, as if he wanted to pounce on Temkin. There were several bottles on the table and some nice-smelling snacks. "Untie him," the major ordered the guards. The major came close to Temkin. A thin, well-shaven face, a pleasant smell of expensive perfumes, Anatoly noticed an attentive sharp look from under frowning whitish eyebrows, a barely noticeable excitement. It seemed that the Hitlerite was at times soothing and non-violent.

looked at the exhausted prisoner, but then in his eyes and on his face, behind the forced smile, one could see either malice or contempt. Finally, taking a step forward and

looking straight at the captured pilot, the major spoke to him in Russian with a little foreign language accent.

- I see you are a pilot, not a saboteur, as I was informed. What a score. Saved and now you are dealing with your colleague. I am also a pilot and was also shot down behind enemy lines. Do not be afraid! We respect brave people and nothing bad will happen to you. Did you jump from a downed plane? Temkin nodded. - What is your

position, rank, surname? "You know that from my documents," answered Temkin. - They don't answer. Who left the plane with you and who is there stayed, I hope you will tell me before we know it ourselves?

"I left the plane first," answered Temkin, "I don't know about the others. You are our

prisoner, we release you from your oath. What you say, no one will know. If you tell valuable information, we will give money and let you go free, if you want, we will send you home to your mother. If you don't speak, the end will be bad, your mother won't see her son. And forget about the oath, you surrendered, and surrender according to your laws is treason. Your newspapers write: "Better death than captivity. You are smart, you want to live. You can live and live well if you keep talking. Where is your flight uniform? the major asked, as if he had not noticed before what the prisoner was brought in. Your soldiers have taken it! answered Tyomkin, still agitated.

- This is a misunderstanding! You can't do that, it's so bad. You can't take things from a prisoner. I will order you to return. What things did our soldiers take from you?

- They took the watch and everything that was in the pockets - money, a letter, documents, Tiomkin told the major.

What a misunderstanding! Everyone will be back! I will order severe punishment guilty.

And the major called a soldier, ordered him to immediately go catch up escorts and bring to him the corporal who delivered the prisoner.

Temkin stood and thought about what else the Nazis would do. The major was completely different from many of the Nazi officers he saw on the posters, which he had read and heard about. In front of him stood a delicate, smart, cleanly dressed and well-shaven officer, he does not scream and does not torture, but wants to give him all the things taken from him, but the pilot knew that he was facing a fascist intelligence officer, perhaps more vile and treacherous than the others. the Nazis.

- Well, now, Lieutenant Temkin, you can be free. - Now you will be fed, rest, your things will be returned to you and you will be sent to other prisoners. Let's talk again before parting. And the major turned away from Temkin, as if he had not even been in the room. He pressed the button and when a soldier came, he gave him an order and Temkin was taken to a small but well-furnished room. Leaving the prisoner in a room with a German soldier, the big man went to the major and received instructions from him. Returning, he set the table and invited Temkin to eat and drink with him while his things were brought. Tall man showed him a place and sat next to him on the right, a soldier with the face of a eunuch sat on the left. -

Eat, no poison, we eat with you - deaf
the big man said in a

voice. No matter how hard Tiomkin tried to calm himself, he did not have an appetite. He was thirsty, but there was no

water. "The water here is bad," the big man explained in a language that Temkin barely understood, we will drink

beer, it is like water. Wanting to quench his thirst, Temkin began to drink beer. After drinking a little, he felt that the beer was fortified. Noticing Temkin's intoxication, the soldiers began to treat him to a strengthened one and drank along with him. Tiomkin felt that he was a little tipsy, but he stopped in time and began to drink less, trying to get his guards drunk.

When the meal was over, the tall man took Temkin into a small room where there was a bed, a table, and two chairs. There he gave him paper, pointed to the ink and said:

- Census all your stuff, I'll give it away. After
Temkin left, the officers began talking among themselves:

"The prisoners must be used, but I can't talk to them like you do, and you can't talk to the Russians like that," Rabbe answered. - You did not work on their territory and now you can innovate, inventing various tricks, but I cannot. I'm too angry at all the Reds, and therefore I can't be alright with the prisoners. The very sight of them infuriates me. Rabbe could no longer speak, the

look of his large bloodshot eyes began to wander, as if he was looking for where the prisoner had gone. With trembling hands he poured and drank a large mug of beer in one gulp, quickly got up and, seeing himself in a large mirror, said sullenly:

"Here, my dear novice intelligence officer, look - I'm only 40 years old, and I'm already turning gray and bald," and he sat heavily in a chair, "this is the result of a three-year struggle against Soviet partisans and saboteurs. -

But now we are no longer in this terrible Russia, it is calmer here. Now we are dealing with anti-fascists, their agitators and saboteurs. It's not the same anymore.

Major Wolf almost said: "It's not like fighting against well-armed partisans, saboteurs, the communist underground." He knew that Rabbe would become very irritated at these words, and therefore he stopped in time.

Major Wolf knew the true reasons for Rabbe's special hatred for the prisoners. At one time, the Sturmbannfuhrer tried to carry out "interesting" operations with the help of prisoners. Once he "processed" one prisoner and transferred him across the front line to the rear of the Soviet Army with the task of delivering packages to Soviet officers whom he wanted to destroy. The packages contained secretly written directives with the following content:

- "Crow from the Falcon." "In view of the disruption of radio communication, we are forced to send you a courier in whom you can completely trust. Your latest data on the state of the division proved to be very valuable. By all means get in touch with us. We listen to you for the first ten minutes of every hour in the dark. The cipher is unchanged. Let us know by radio or by courier when you can listen to us and when it is most convenient for you to transmit information to us. Falcon".

The prisoner memorized all the information he needed about the addressees. He was categorically warned that if he did not deliver the packages, the Soviet command would be informed that the prisoner had given a subscription, pledging to work in favor of the Gestapo. Fearing that the recruited would chicken out and not hand over the packages, Rabbe ordered the prisoner to be transferred so that he would be caught when crossing

the front line. The soldier in trouble agreed, but let Rabbe down. Fearing that the packages would be found during the search and he would be caught red-handed, the defector threw them before he went to the location of the Soviet troops. The captured soldier who escaped to freedom reasoned that the Gestapo was much more important than their agents, who held more prominent posts than he, and therefore the Nazis would not tell anyone about him. In the afternoon, packages sent to Rabbe by two Soviet officers were picked up by German soldiers, and by evening they returned to him again. The Gestapo man understood what was the matter and became furious, but decided to send another prisoner with a package before exposing the prisoner who had deceived him. And so that he would not throw them away again before the search, he sewed them into clothes without warning the person being thrown. The prisoner was supposed to, on the instructions of Rabbe, find the officers to whom the packages were intended, and transfer the password he had memorized, after which he would receive a task from them and go deep into the country to conduct reconnaissance. Rabbe again took care that the new contact was detained and searched, and

then, according to his calculations, he would frankly confess and compromise the Soviet officers there. The recruited "runaway prisoner", as Rabbe calculated, was detained at the forefront. An experienced border guard whom he came across for questioning, having discovered the packages during the search, noticed that the defector himself was surprised by the find. The defector locked himself up for a long time, but the fact was obvious: two packages with encrypted letters were found in his clothes and he confessed everything, naming the names of the officers to whom he was supposed to appear and receive their further instructions. An experienced investigator gave the defector the opportunity to appear at the addressees, but the first addressee, the chief of staff of the division, Colonel N., detained the "agent" a

traitor. The Soviet investigator did not fall for the bait, and Rabbe's idea failed.

He wrote Rabbe appeals to the partisans with a call to stop the fight and with promises to provide them with work in their specialty, but again to no avail. The commander of the Fugas partisan detachment sent him a mocking reply that he willingly agreed to stop all struggle against the fascist guards and work in his wartime specialty - to derail military trains - even if the Gestapo does not interfere with him, and he will not touch the guards. And Rabbe did not compose anything else, he lost his taste for

combinations. Major Wolf was a young intelligence officer, he took from the Jesuits

their insidious methods to get into the souls of people, his motto - the end justifies the means. He had strong nerves, artistic abilities. On people who did not know him, he could give the impression of a direct generous, very humane and charming person. Not everyone could immediately recognize that his pleasant appearance covered the meanest soul. After the defeat of the Nazi troops near Stalingrad, Major Wolf lost faith in the victory of Nazi Germany and decided to link his fate with

American intelligence. For half a year of work in intelligence on the Eastern Front, he became convinced of the ever-increasing strength of the Soviet Army. In his opinion, there was only one outcome - to open the front in the West, capitulate to the Anglo-Americans and give them the opportunity to reach the eastern borders of Germany and thereby save it from the penetration of Russian troops. He believed that the Anglo-Americans would only scold, and one could not expect mercy from the Russians. But he carefully concealed his thoughts even in the most frank conversations with friends. He preached in every possible way the need to push the allies against each other, always stressing that then "we will quickly defeat our enemies."

Having lost faith in victory, Major Wolf began to capitalize on a currency that would not be subject to either confiscation or inflation. He considered agents in the rear of the Soviet Army to be such capital, and he intensively began to recruit them.

Major Wolf and SS Sturmbannführer Rabbe were friends, often went to each other to share impressions and information. Major Wolf handed over to Rabbe those whom he could no longer use for intelligence purposes. Rabbe was a great master of killing - Obersturmführer Klaus Müller, his death machine, took everyone to be destroyed on his last journey. "It's time for me to go home." I beg you to ask this type how many people jumped out of their plane, - Rabbe turned to Wolf. "Be calm, I'll get it," answered Wolf. After a short pause, Rabbe stood up heavily, wished him success and

said goodbye.

After seeing Rabbe off, Major Wolf drank a glass of cognac, ate a sandwich and called his assistant, Lieutenant Adolf Schwartz. He, as always, appeared with a work card. "The corporal has arrived, delivering the prisoner," he reported. - Let me in! I'll show you an interesting number. The major looked so sternly at the corporal who entered that he shuddered. - Where are the things of the Russian officer? he asked sternly. - Distributed among the needy soldiers. - Immediately deliver everything to me, every single thread. When you need it, I will give it to you. Who took his watch? "Me," admitted the corporal. "Let's get over here and run for the rest of the things." The stunned corporal handed over the watch, looking at it as if it had been given to him by his wife. Turning around like a scalded man, he ran out of the mansion and ordered the return of Temkin's things. When Temkin was brought in for interrogation for the second time, the major and a fit young lieutenant like him looked at the watch that gleamed on the prisoner's wrist.

"Well, everything seems to be all right, doesn't it?" the major turned to Temkin.

"Yes, so far all right," answered Tyomkin, who seemed tipsy. Let's meet and get started. Are you a communist? - No, non-partisan.

- Why? -

Long business. I didn't want to apply and disturb the ashes of my parents.

- Why?

"Their

biography is inappropriate. - Why?

- They were

numbered among the kulaks. - Amazing.

We managed to detain another member of your crew. As you will soon see, it was in vain that we were not warned in time.

The major pressed the button and Dobryakov's parachute was brought into

the room. Do you know? "No," Tyomkin replied. - Not my parachute. — Not yours, so

whose? -

Don't know! - Fine. The major pressed a button, and an elderly thin man in civilian clothes entered. With yellowed fingers he held several photographs. The major took them in his hands and showed one of them

to Temkin. Temkin's hops vanished as if by magic. He saw himself in the company of the Nazis and read over the photo a fabricated appeal from his name.

"Bastards! Scoundrels! Provocateurs! Reptiles," the indignant pilot thought, and the major calmly walked around the room, rubbing his hands. And when Temkin calmed down a little, Wolf said to him: "Don't worry. Why be sad? If you tell me the truth about what I will ask, then no one will see this picture, and you will get the opportunity to live and return home, but if you lie or remain silent, yours will read this call.

And he began to

read: "Comrades and brothers in arms! You have entered a foreign land. Stop! Enough blood. Stop! Otherwise, you will die." And what an ending! "We are treated well in the German army, go over to her side! See you soon!" And the picture is good! The Soviet pilot clinks glasses with the SS. Amazing! The handwriting is so well forged that no one will ever discover the forgery."

As in a dream, Tiomkin listened to the major's murderous words for him. The thought flashed to rush at the provocateur, but the escort stood alert on the side, ready for a flash of anger from the captive.

Overcoming indignation, the Soviet pilot remained calm and thought hard about how to get out of the situation, so as not only not to become a traitor, but so that his enemies could not do this about him.
say.

"Your life and honor are in your hands," the major went on ingratiatingly. Decide. You have two options: tell us everything and live, or die like a traitor cursed by his people. And Temkin stood and thought.

- I'm waiting. I'm waiting for your reasonable answer," the major reminded him. "Well, if I tell you everything, what is the guarantee that you won't send this fake or do not make another provocation.

"Let's be frank: it's in our interests not to extradite you, but to throw you back, so that no one will ever think that you were captured by us.

— Caught. There is nothing left for me. Agree. Give me some water," Tiomkin barely

squeezed out. - Here you go! This is another matter. Temkin was given sparkling water to drink. And the questions began. The major and his assistant asked,

Temkin answered. - You claim that you jumped alone, but whose parachute is it? the

major asked again. - Major, I jumped first and, in my opinion, no one else could jump. And the parachute is not

familiar to me. The major began to clarify the location of the airfields. Temkin showed their location on the map. —

But there are models, not planes, and you say that this is a real airfield? the major asked. "It's true, there used to be

mock-ups, but now fighter planes have been transported there, and in place of the mock-ups there are already real planes, also small, but I saw a lot of them nearby in the forest. Previously, no one was detained close by, but now they began to detain, "Temkin assured the Nazis.

"If you lie, it will be bad, if it's true, it will be good," said the major. "I know,"

Tyomkin replied. The

lieutenant put the airfield on the map. When he asked Temkin about another airfield on which his unit was based, he said that there really were planes on it, but there were only three of them left, the rest were based on another airfield. Yes, next to the real guns near the airfield there are wooden ones, he convinced the officers. They looked at each other. -

Why are you

telling lies? Are there real guns out there? the lieutenant asked.

"Yes, and there

were real cannons, I used to see them, but now they have taken them away and put wooden ones," answered

Temkin. Temkin spoke so boldly and with conviction that the

Germans believed him. For a long time they interrogated Temkin, but he was already so excited that he told the interrogators more and more about military facilities. The scouts were especially interested in the warehouse of aerial bombs and carefully

marked it on the map. Judging by the mood, the major and another officer were satisfied with the results of the interrogation. Temkin was painfully worried about what had happened. Everything happened so quickly and irreparably! He firmly knew that military secrets should not be given out to the enemy, he himself taught others to keep them and knew how many soldiers captured by the Nazis spat in the face of their tormentors and died without saying anything. But he didn't because of the picture and fake signature. He made another move. And in the memory of Temkin, the image of his first

military mentor, Alexei Grigorievich Chizhikov, came up. "And Kotovsky, when it bandits," Tiomkin justified his behavior.

When the interrogation was over, the major glanced at Temkin, as drunkards sometimes look at an empty bottle. The prisoner caught his dismissive look and felt something

unkind. And the major decided how to use the prisoner in the future, who could no longer give him anything to supplement the data on the Soviet Army.

Seeing the pliability of Temkin, the major immediately decided to take over the addresses of people whom he could use in the future by blackmail in his own interests, using for this purpose the captured pilot who was at his disposal.

"We are done with military matters. If you showed us everything truthfully, in a day or two we can let you go and, if you want, transfer you to yours. And now I ask you to write us personal data about your relatives with your own hand, indicating the last name, first name, patronymic, age, place of residence, appearance, class.

And the major listed as many as thirty points by heart and forced Temkin to write them down, then sent him to the room where he was given water and photographed along with the jubilant Nazis.

"Well, the scoundrel," thought the prisoner, "wants to find out the addresses of my relatives, send spies or saboteurs to them there, and leave me here as a hostage. No, as long as the spies get there, our Berlin will be taken. Well, duds, he decided. - I will give you such relatives that it is better not to. The most important thing, he thought, is not to confuse when repeating. And he

began to write data not about his relatives, but about the relatives of his neighbor known to him - police captain Stepan Yegorchuk. When he finished, he even somehow felt better at heart: let them come. "Stepan has a clue in his

passports, he will expose him at once," he thought. When he handed over the

data on relatives, the big man sent them with a soldier to the major. Lieutenant Schwartz

entered the room and said: "They'll take you to the room now." Then you will come to me, and I will give you good food and wine. You will sit there for a while like a prisoner of war, and then we will send. If you want - to work, if you want - to Russia. - And how can you send me to Russia, they

will arrest me there his own, Tiomkin asked.

- Don't be afraid! This is our business. You will see your mother. We ourselves will let you run, where we will straighten the front, we will leave you there. No one will know that you were our prisoner.

Tiomkin again had confidence in salvation. The Germans believed him. Late in the evening, he noticed that the sentry had gone away, and without a moment's hesitation, opened the window, looked around - no one was visible, and began to quickly leave this house. By morning, he safely approached the intended forest.

Chapter

4 Foot Pilots

Buntsev landed on the outskirts of the workers' settlement, one and a half kilometers from the railway junction. Looking around, he noticed Kretova with relief. At this time, the plane crashed into the station and a fire started there. "Where can

we hide our parachutes so that no dog can find them," Olga whispered. - The material is very good, it's a pity to drown in a filthy place. Anyway, as long as we have nothing to carry, we will take the domes with us, and hide the traces. Kretova quickly cut

off the traces from the parachute canopies with a knife. They hid the strings and straps in the ground, removing the turf with a knife. Focusing on the glow of the ever-increasing fire at the railway junction, Buntsev and Kretova went in a westerly direction.

"This is not in the air for you," thought Buntsev, striding in his fur boots. You can't develop speed on your own two feet, you won't go far, and if you don't find food, you'll completely disappear, "the captain rhymed to himself, walking heavily after the radio operator.

Experienced partisan Olga Kretova felt quite confident behind enemy lines in Hungary. After joining her detachment with the troops of the Red Army, Kretova asked to be sent to conduct partisan struggle outside the Soviet Motherland, but she was sent to the regular troops. Now, thanks to an accident, she got behind enemy lines. She walked, straining her ears and peering around, so as not to fall on the enemy. Both the captain and Kretov were thinking about Temkin and Dobryakov. Where are they? What's up with them? They walked in silence until they came to the road. At this time, new strong explosions began at the node. "Let's take the road north," Kretova

suggested. - Now

they are not up to us.

"We'll have to go through — to confuse the tracks," Buntsev agreed, "until our last blow is in effect.

And they went to the northeast. Walked along the road around half a kilometer. The lights of a car appeared ahead.

"We'll have to give way," said Buntsev. "And cover your tracks," Kretova put in. And they got off road, moving quickly to the side. -

Lie down! Lie down, otherwise they will see, - the radio operator pleaded. "Oh, it's not in the air for you," Buntsev thought again, stretched out on the wet ground.

A powerful passenger car quickly swept past them. Buntsev and Kretova got up, shook off the dirt from their clothes as best they could, and again went out onto the road in a southeasterly direction. We walked along the road for another three hundred meters, and when we saw a small field road going in a northwestern direction, we turned onto it.

Dawn began. And the glow of the fires at the station dimmed. Clouds of dark yellow smoke went up into

the sky. "We must quickly find shelter for the day," Olga whispered. The terrain was flat and there were no thickets or other cover nearby. There was tall corn ahead. That's where the pilots went. The cobs were already harvested, leaving tall stems in the field. Kretova noticed the

boundary and stopped. — Comrade Captain! Here. Mezha. Traces are hardly noticeable, and they are easy to disguise.

They began to move deep into the cornfield. We walked over 300 meters. When it became noticeable that the corn was running out and that the mowed field was farther away, Kretova

stopped. - Now let's go to the side. They turned 20 meters to the left, then walked back 100 meters to the road, left again and came almost to the edge of the cornfield and stopped. They could see what was being done in the mowed field, and they remained invisible in the corn, less than three kilometers from the railway junction on which they had dealt a crushing blow, less than one kilometer from the estate.

- Olga! Get in! It's time to rest. Quite confused traces. It won't help us much when they start looking for us. "You

can sit down and rest," the radio operator agreed. Now, if they follow in the footsteps, then we will notice them before they notice us, and we

we can follow them.

Putting one parachute on the ground, the pilots sat down and involuntarily listened to what was happening nearby. They distinctly heard the rumble of motor vehicles moving along the road. From time to time from the station came the horns of locomotives, auxiliary trains, the howl of fire engine sirens. There are no signs of strangers nearby. Kretova settled down on a parachute,

took off, cleaned her boots and set them to dry. Then she took out her emergency supply and invited the captain to the table. The pilots were hungry, but there was no food.

It turned out that there was no water, and the transferred experiences affected. They were worried about the fate of Temkin and Dobryakov. The earth was saturated with

autumn rains and the radio operator dug a hole with her Finn, into which water soon began to fill. So the problem of water supply was solved.

Having refreshed themselves, Kretova and Buntsev again sat silently and

listened. Despite the sleepless night, the captain and radio operator could

not sleep. "It would be more like night—and to the assembly point in the forest," said Kretova,

glancing at her watch. "And you look less at your watch, but go to sleep and the night will come sooner,"

Buntsev answered her affectionately. It seemed to him that only now for the first time he saw his radio operator so close. Her open, tired face with blue under her eyes seemed to him more beautiful than when they were on their own.

Olga, noticing the captain's long, attentive look, lowered her head, took off her cap and began to straighten her

hair. For the first time, Captain Buntsev met Kretova in early June 1943, when he stayed for a day at a partisan airfield 500 km from the front line. Kretova, together with her squad leader, arrived at the airfield to receive ammunition. The nights were short and the

planes didn't make it in one night deliver cargo to the partisans, take the wounded and return back.

Having free time, Kretova began to help camouflage Buntsev's plane. That's how they met.

In the spring of 1944, the partisan detachment, in which Kretova was located, joined forces with the Red Army. All attempts by Kretova to get back behind enemy lines as part of a partisan detachment or organizing group were unsuccessful. There were many partisans who wanted to continue the fight behind enemy lines, and a few were sent behind enemy lines, mainly experienced miners with a large personal account, eminent radio operators, and Kretova was a miner without a personal account, a radio operator with little experience.

When the war began, Olga was only seventeen. She is sensible that she graduated from the ten-year school in Barnaul and was preparing to enter the Polytechnic Institute. The war was both far and near. There was no blackout, but trains with mobilized were sent to the front. Kretova applied to the military registration and enlistment office, the district committee of the Komsomol,

but no one sent her to the Red Army. From the reports of the Soviet Information Bureau, Olya learned about the fighting of the partisans behind enemy lines, and she was drawn to the partisans. The environment has spoken. Her father, Vasily Kretov, and many of her father's friends fought in the rear of the White Guards in 1918–1920. My daughter often listened to their stories. In the autumn of 1941, Olga said goodbye to her parents and reached Moscow by passing trains. She got accepted into the school. She trained as a miner, but the demand for miners among the partisans decreased - many good demolition workers were practically trained

behind enemy lines. Kretova began to train as a radio operator. Buntsev recalled the path he had traveled, recalled how he delivered goods to the partisans, took out the wounded and children to our rear, spent the day at partisan "airfields" behind enemy lines, landed on unexplored sites when the same lights beckoned him into a trap, recalled the stories of the partisans, regretting that did not pay attention to their tactics. He did not rule out that he could be shot down behind enemy lines, but he did not think about what he would do there then: how, where to go. Now it seemed to him an unforgivable omission to be with the partisans, along with

the partisans, and not to know all the intricacies of partisan tactics. Previously, the combat activity of partisans seemed to him so simple that, if necessary, every military man can immediately become a good partisan, but then it

comfortable on the plane, turned out to be unsuitable for operations on the ground behind enemy lines: the high boots got wet, weighed down, and there was nowhere to dry. Swollen from a fine autumn rain and a fur jacket. It's good that you took parachute canopies with you, otherwise you'll get wet all day on the wet ground. But what to do when the remnants of a modest emergency reserve are eaten up, what to do when they do not find Dobryakov and Temkin at the

assembly point? "It was good for the partisans on their native land," thought the captain. - Everything is there: people and land. But here it's not the same, everything is different. Here you will not dress like an uncle, you will not ask for directions, you will not even ask for food, so as not to be discovered. So try to walk here, make your way to your own.

He remembered the stories of two partisans who escaped from fascist captivity, walked several hundred kilometers in Germany, almost a thousand kilometers in Poland, and still reached their own.

"Well, my radio operator is an experienced partisan, and therefore God ordered to go through all the obstacles to his own," the captain thought.

Kretova did not sleep and experienced her helplessness, she felt guilty that she had not thought of getting a portable radio station just in case, in order to be able to
contact the earth.

"But I had a Severok with the partisans - that would come in handy, I handed it over to the warehouse, and it may be lying there unnecessarily," she thought. The

day dragged on endlessly. In the afternoon, when Olga remained in guard, Buntsev fell asleep. In a dream, he saw himself on a plane landing at his native airfield, but was awakened by Olga. Nearby were single shots and shouts in a foreign language.

"Are they looking for us?" the commander asked, and they prepared for battle. Shots were heard

so close that they could hear the whistle of bullets flying by. One of the bullets flew over Kretova's head, and a corn stalk, killed by a bullet, fell in front of her. The pilots listened intently and remained silent.

- It is not clear why they shoot so much and stupidly at corn? Don't they think that a whole platoon has settled here, "Olga whispered, squeezing the machine gun tighter in her hands.

Buntsev was silent. He felt uneasy on earth. It was clear that they would not be able to repel an enemy attack or leave if they were detected. And the shooting stopped, then started again. Again there was a conversation, screams. Finally, the shooting ended, the engine of the car roared, and soon there was silence, and only in the distance at the node were the horns of locomotives heard.

- Unclear. Is the search really over, Buntsev whispered. - Maybe. Parrots. They thought who would run out or fly out. The pilots did not know that eight enemy officers from one of the burnt echelons were reveling on the occasion of getting rid of death, waiting for the restoration of traffic, practicing shooting and not suspecting that they were having fun in the neighborhood with those who defeated the railway junction. They arrived in cars, parked them only two hundred meters from the place where Buntsev and Kretova were hiding. Having drunk solidly for joy, they shot and drove towards the city. The threat has passed. "Where are Temkin and Dobryakov now?" Kretova asked.

"Perhaps they are waiting for us at the assembly point," answered Buntsev. After recovering from the experience associated with the appearance of lovers to shoot, they refreshed themselves from their meager supplies and began to discuss a plan for further action. A decision was made: before going to the forest to the assembly point, it was necessary to get food so that one could wait at the assembly point without appearing in front of anyone. We discussed the details of food production for a long time. The main difficulty was that the clothes unmasked them, and they had no money. Finally, Buntsev made a decision. As soon as it got dark, they came out of hiding and went to the farm. They walked slowly, stopped, listened, and again cautiously moved on. The farm was small. A faint light filtered through the curtains in the windows. Footsteps and incomprehensible voices were often heard in the street. I had to wait when the lights went out in all the houses, except for one, the largest. We decided to enter it.

As agreed, Buntsev took off his headdress and put on Kretova's cloak. They knocked on the window overlooking the street. The owner immediately responded and asked something in an incomprehensible language.

"Hir is golden," the captain replied. — The owner said something still, but the door did not open.

- Yes, I told you that Ukraine is not for you. You don't know what he's saying, you can't answer and, of course, not a single eccentric will open the door to strangers.

Nothing, it will open now. The farm is small, there are no German soldiers, and where there are none, we can be masters there and in the rear, "Olga whispered. And Buntsev believed this fragile girl,

who held her machine gun at the ready. But before he could force the owner to open the door, they heard the angry barking of a large dog in the house.

- This creature can spoil the whole thing for us, we will have to move away. They walked away from the house. But before they had even gone fifty paces, they heard the barking of a dog that had run out into the street. They began to leave the ill-fated house even faster. But the owner turned out to be not one of the cowardly ones, and after the dog went out with a gun to the porch. Having received reinforcements, the shepherd dog began to pursue the troublemakers more resolutely.

- Shoot her, the damned one, but don't draw attention to yourself, Buntsev whispered. And the dog, as if sensing the danger, became little by little lag behind and, finally, grumbling, returned back.

Buntsev and Kretova stopped. Olga looked at her watch - local time was only 20.35. "We have at least two hours left for preparations.

After 23:00 we can no longer show anywhere. Comrade captain," the radio operator continued, "soon we will need to cross the railway, let's make a couple of kilometers to the side and thereby show a false direction, and prepare some food from the railway workers, somewhere in the booth near the crossing, the people are poorer there, dogs, probably, do not hold, but we will not offend them. An hour later they came to the railway and walked along it in an easterly direction until they came to a moving house and stopped near it.

The railroad, as the pilots expected, was not guarded by anyone. Soon the lights of the train appeared. At the crossing, a red light came on and short bells were heard. Came out of the booth

watchman. He saw off the train and, making sure that everything was in order, returned home when two armed men came out to meet him: Buntsev in Kretova's raincoat, and Kretova from a parachute, painted with grass and smeared with earth so skillfully that at night you can't distinguish it from a real raincoat.

In broken German, Kretova asked for bread, bacon, or butter, and in return offered a gilded watch bracelet. The watchman picked up the chain, looked at Kretova and explained that he did not have enough bread and other products to equal such a thing in value. Squinting, the watchman asked who they were and where they were going. Buntsev and Kretova began to impersonate mobilized Slovaks who had fled from the German army.

"Now a lot of people run, and a lot of people get caught and die. Yesterday two were caught..." the watchman began to tell, also in broken German.

Although Buntsev and Kretova did not understand well, when they heard that two had been caught yesterday, they looked at each other and, stopping the watchman, began to ask what these two looked like. Fortunately, many signs did not converge: they were almost the same height, and Temkin was taller than Dobryakov. The bell rang. There was a train. However, the crossing watchman did not go to meet him, but invited the newcomers to come to his house, but the pilots, having looked at each other, refused. They didn't want the watchman to see them in the light. Kretova began to persuade the watchman to take the bracelet and give them food, even if it was cheaper. She showed on her fingers that they had to go for another whole week, and they didn't want to go to anyone else. The watchman took the bracelet and entered the house. A woman's voice was heard. Painful minutes passed. Finally he went out and brought out a whole loaf of white bread, a large piece of smoked ham.

The pilots began to quickly pack food and did not notice how the caretaker's excited wife suddenly appeared. She touched Kretova's hand and began to insert the bracelet into it. Olga began to refuse, but the elderly woman resolutely insisted that Kretova take her bracelet and a whole bag of apples. The pilot did not see in the dark how tears appeared in the eyes of an elderly woman. It was she who remembered her brother Santo, a worker from Miskolc. He left for Spain in 1936, and perhaps now, like these unfortunate

needed a piece of bread, or maybe ... and she wiped her tears with a handkerchief. Saying goodbye to the watchman

and his wife, Buntsev and Kretova went north to Bratislava. When the booth was out of sight, they stopped. They listened. Nothing suspicious.

"Well, yes, this is not a landowner for you, but the proletarians of all countries, they are against the Nazis," said the captain. "But, on the other hand, we have no reason to believe that they will not tell anyone about our meeting. Now there is nothing to connect them. "If they didn't take anything, then, being honest

people, they won't tell anyone anything. If someone is a scoundrel, then the bracelet will not hold him," Kretova noticed. Well, now let's figure out how to cover your tracks. It is not air here, but earth, and, unfortunately, traces remain.

"But there would be no happiness, but misfortune helped. So do we. Although it is drizzling, it washes away our tracks on the pavement, so we will have to find a paved road in the direction we need, and try to arrive at the assembly point as early as possible so that the tracks have time to "catch a cold," the experienced partisan thought.

They could not find a road in the right direction, but they came across a field with a stable turf surface, and they turned in the direction of the collection point.

They walked for a long time in the dark. Stopped, listened, again walked. Nobody noticed them.

Approaching the forest at 250-300 meters, the pilots stopped, lay down and began to study the situation. Nothing suspicious. Everything is quiet.

"What does it mean? Who is there in the forest, where the collection point is appointed. Their? Ambush? Or is there no one?

It was already well after midnight when Buntsev and Kretova entered the forest and, stepping noiselessly, listening to every rustle, went

look for a designated place.

Chapter

5 Underground Workers Operate

When Captain Buntsev's plane flew up to the Szeged railway junction on one engine, it was packed with military trains. Among the other echelons, almost in the center of the junction, two trains stood side by side: one with tanks, the second with looted equipment. The alarm alerted everyone immediately. Whoever had the opportunity tried to get away from the knot full of echelons. Those who could not leave were anxiously awaiting the start of the raid. As part of the echelon with the looted property, there was one car with people driven to hard labor from countries where the robber hordes of the Nazis invaded. There were also several Soviet women among the foreign workers. In different ways, they got into the nets set up by the Nazis, and now they were sitting in a full carriage, cursing the day when they broke away from Motherland. Among them were two girls: the Kuban Cossack Shura Nechaeva and the daughter of a Donetsk miner Nina Malkova. They were members of the anti-fascist underground organization Iskra. They got into the same carriage, became friends and long ago decided to run away, and run away in such a way that they would repay the enemy for everything they endured, so that the fascists would pay for their sweat, for all the mockery of them with blood, but for a long time there was no suitable opportunity.

When the anti-aircraft artillery opened fire and panic began, the head of the convoy, not distinguished by his courage, left reliable sentries in the echelon, and he himself, with especially valuable technical personnel, quickly began to move away from the flammable echelons.

"Let's try to escape," Nina whispered to her friend when they, along with other foreign masters, remained in a locked wagon.

Shura nodded in agreement. "Everything is according to plan number two," Malkova whispered and went to end of the car, to the sentry.

He walks, but his legs give way, they do not want to obey. When we planned, agreed, everything seemed somehow simpler, safer, but now, when it is necessary to act, the legs have become exactly

strangers. It seemed to her that she was about to stop, could not stand it, would not approach the sentry and turn back. But she walked and walked.

- What do you need? asked the sentry, looking intently at
approached.

It seemed to Nina that the sentry guessed that they
conceived and therefore he looks so wary.

At this time, they distinctly heard a knock at the door on
opposite end of the car.

"Someone from the other doors is asking for you. The big boss asks, officer. He demands
to open the door for him," said Malkova, not recognizing her own voice. The sentry, having
checked the reliability of the door

lock, put the key in
pocket and went with the girl through the car to the other door.

Malkova walked ahead, and it seemed to her that an irreparably terrible thing was about
to happen. When the sentry was walking along the carriage past her friend, Shura suddenly
rushed at him, hit him on the head with a heavy spittoon. Following her, three other girls rushed
at the Nazi at once. The attack was well thought out in advance, and now everyone acted
decisively and desperately. The sentry's corpse was shoved under the lower bench. Twenty-
four slaves were free. They had a key at their disposal, they took the Hitlerite's weapon and,
using the blackout, quietly left the car. There was no one around. The station was on fire. Let's
add a light! Nina suggested. Let's add. It was not in vain that I worked at the warehouse of the
GSMV of the machine and tractor station. Malkova quickly opened one of the tanks, and
gasoline flowed violently from it. Having moistened a handkerchief

with fuel, she wrapped a stone with it, walked away, lit it
and threw it under the cistern. Suddenly, a wide flame illuminated the girls, singing them
a little, and a few minutes later the

tank exploded, and it seemed that the fire ended there, but soon the car raged and
explosions began.

Breaking free, Shura and Nina felt a huge responsibility towards their friends released
from captivity. Only five of them were initiated into preparations for the escape, the rest fled
from the car, taking advantage of the panic. According to the plan you need

it was necessary to make their way north, into the mountains, and there - to the Slovak partisans, but now everyone was worried about the question: where to go? where to hide for the day?

Shura was more experienced than the others. She drove horses at night in peacetime. The darkness didn't scare her. The liberated were divided into two groups. One group was led by Nina and Shura, the second group was led by silent Stefa from Bratislava. For the day, both groups settled in corn behind the railway village. HC who escaped to freedom had no documents, no skills, and everything one machine for all.

The echelon burned to the ground, and no one guessed the true culprits of the fire. No one took an interest in the "dead" prisoners. The day went well. Evening came. We decided to go further separately in two groups. They said goodbye and parted ways. The girls had no food, but they could not find anything in the fields, the cobs were already harvested. And so, when they approached the first small settlement, they decided to get food there, but the dog barked, and the girls moved away. They walked all night, going around all the residential areas, and by morning, exhausted, they found themselves in an open field and hid again in the corn for the day. A peasant found them there and, having learned what was the matter, showed them an unharvested strip of corn. Satisfying hunger and making a small supply, lay down to rest. But it started to rain, and soon they were soaking wet, and there was no place to dry their clothes. And so the fugitives succumbed to the temptation, with the onset of darkness, to go to the village and come in to dry their clothes, which they agreed with their benefactor. As it got dark, he came to the girls and took them to his house. There the twelve wet ones dried off and slept, but lingered too long and stayed for the day. The owner hid the girls in a barn, where they sat safely for the whole day, which seemed to them incredibly long. The second evening came, and the girls left their hospitable hosts.

Chapter

6 The Gestapo got alarmed

While observing, Dobryakov discovered that the house was guarded by a sentry, who occasionally passed by the gap from which he watched. "I wonder who is being guarded? Isn't it me? They are probably looking for me," he thought, and not without reason.

Around noon, one of the Nazi platoons involved in the search for pilots cordoned off the garden in which stood a dilapidated two-story house where Dobryakov was hiding. The Nazis secretly

settled behind the fence, and three policemen were sent to the house of appropriately equipped. Quite by chance, they approached the images, gap from the opposite side, from which Dobryakov was observing.

Standing at the almost blocked window, Dobryakov peered and listened to the rustle of the steps of approaching people, and suddenly, almost above the window, he heard Russian speech in a half-whisper:

- Stop, you see, the sentry is

walking! And then out loud: Who's there? Come out!

Yours have arrived! Dobryakov was stunned by surprise, but it seemed to him that it was only heard. He caught the suspicious accent as well. It was clearly not a Russian or a Ukrainian who spoke Russian.

The vigilance developed over the years had an effect, and although he was always waiting for his own, he overcame the desire to respond. And he sat motionless. My heart was beating fast, but not from joy, but from imminent danger. But those who came passed by the gap. Dobryakov could see boots and overcoats, but no faces were visible. And he again heard Russian speech with an unpleasant accent.

"Maybe someone got screwed over

here?" "Hey, you, black-eyed, why are you walking around there uselessly?

Go, check the cellars, the stranger commanded

again. Dobryakov broke out in a cold sweat. Thoughts swirled

like that. "Is it the end?" he thought.

Dobryakov heard from the partisans that gangs of traitors were operating in the rear of the Nazis.

"Are there traitors here too? Reptiles! he thought. - And I almost responded."

Soon he heard a command in German and the voice of what one of the traitors called a lieutenant. "They are here, and we have nothing to do. All around march! Dobryakov wanted to throw a grenade at the traitors, but he refrained, moved away from the crack and sat down tired in a corner behind the barrels.

A faint light shone into the cellar from a boarded-up window. Again the German command was heard, then footsteps. Dobryakov froze, sitting on the floor. When everything was quiet, he got up and went to the window. There was no one to be seen in the garden. The mechanic felt tired and returned to the corner.

Chapter

7 Ivan Mikhailovich Dobryakov

The tired pilot lay down in the dark behind the barrels and began to think about a way out of a difficult situation. He recalled how he and Tiomkin ended up behind enemy lines in September 1941. Their aircraft, after a raid on enemy targets, was so badly damaged that they also had to jump out with a parachute. Upon landing, they ended up at the location of the 40th Army. The military unit where they landed was surrounded, and they were captured along with it. The prisoners were taken to the west. There were few convoys. They brought them to some village and stopped to rest. The guards allowed the locals to feed the prisoners. Treated them politely, laughed, joked. After a short rest we went further west. The head of the convoy rode a horse and spoke to the prisoners in Russian with a big accent: - You will be very happy in Germany. Well

done guys for giving up. For the night they were placed in a large building of the village school. There were no enemy troops in the village, and on the way they did not meet any troops. The school building was overflowing with prisoners. The transition was long. The prisoners and escorts were tired, and when everyone settled in, the people finished off the remnants of the food that they were given in the village during the day. Drinking water was brought in buckets. The doors were closed for the night, two sentries were stationed at the doors, the rest rested in neighboring classrooms. The prisoners also lay down on the floor. Only a small group, led by platoon commander Semyon Zorin, did not sleep. Long after midnight, the sentries at the door fell asleep. Zorin with two Red Army soldiers suddenly attacked them and neutralized them. With their weapons, a group of several people broke into the classroom and seized the rest of the weapons. As a result, the guards were captured. They woke up all the former Red Army soldiers, and Zorin invited everyone to join the partisan detachment and go into the forest. You will have to arm yourself with the weapons that will be found on the battlefields. The pilots immediately went along with

Zorin, and a significant part of the Red Army dispersed in different directions.

A week later, Zorin had a detachment of 60 people, while the guards from the prisoners also became partisans. There were no Germans in the villages. Local communists and Komsomol members came to the detachment, who also decided to fight the enemies. The German command learned about the creation of a partisan detachment, but the partisans were vigilant and set up an ambush. The punishers were defeated, and the detachment was replenished with

new weapons. October came and the storm began. The partisans decided to move east along the rear of the enemy, suddenly attacking his rear units. The population supplied the partisans with the missing food, clothing, shoes, and brought the picked up weapons. There were already over a hundred people in the detachment. In

early December, three excited peasants came to the detachment and brought leaflets in which it was written: drive the Germans into the cold, set fire to the houses in which the enemies were housed. The peasants asked not to burn their houses, then they would have nowhere to live. There were more and more of these walkers. They said that the Germans use these leaflets to recruit local men to become policemen in order to protect their homes from partisans. Zorin and his assistants decided that these leaflets were a German fake, but they were soon able to verify that

this is wrong.

And the frosts were getting stronger. Partisan intelligence established that there was no solid front line, and Zorin decided to join forces with the Red Army. In mid-December, they went to the location of our troops. We arrived on a sleigh. And they brought all the wounded. During this time, the former German escorts became good partisans. Some of them died in clashes with the Nazis.

Dobryakov recalled that they did not then have experienced partisans, trained saboteurs. I also remembered the case when, having decided to attack the German garrison, they cut the communication wires, and the Germans called for help on the radio, and they had to hastily retreat.

Zorin's detachment, having safely left the German rear, was one of those few partisan formations that were formed from Soviet soldiers who, due to the prevailing situation, found themselves behind enemy lines, which did not include a single

commander and political worker who were trained in special educational institutions in the early 30s. The platoon

commander only read a lot about the partisans of the civil war, when the partisans solved their tasks by a surprise attack on the enemy, but he himself was not ready for such a fight so as not to engage in a military clash. Zorin was drafted into the army in the fall of 1939 and did not know that in the Red Army at the end of the 1920s, hundreds of commanders and political workers were intensively trained to conduct partisan operations according to the principle: to inflict damage on the enemy, preserving and increasing their forces, without engaging in direct action. fight with the enemy. But, unfortunately, by the autumn of 1939, there were almost no such personnel left in the Red Army; they were repressed in 1937-1938.

From the author

In the first months of the Great Patriotic War, from its first days, partisan actions began behind enemy lines. The first detachments were created in the occupied territory, later they began to be trained in the rear of the Red Army, but this training was short-lived and clearly insufficient. The partisans had no means of communication. And these hastily prepared formations, according to the apt expression of the Hero of the Soviet Union, Major General M. I. Naumov, burned up at the first collision with the enemy, like moths over a fire. So, in Ukraine, in 1941, several hundred partisan detachments and sabotage groups with a total number of about 35 thousand people were transferred and left during the withdrawal of our troops. By the end of June 1942, only 30 partisan detachments with a total number of slightly more than 4 thousand people got in touch with the UShPD. And only by the spring of 1943 in the Ukrainian partisan formations, the number reached 30 thousand people. In 1942, Ukrainian partisans caused 202 train wrecks, and in 1943 over 3,500. At the first clashes with the enemy, two regiments formed in Kiev ceased to exist: one under the command of the captain of the border troops E.K.

Chekhov in the amount of 110 people, the other under the command of the major of the border troops E.E.

1070 people. Died in unequal battles and their commanders. And all because the enemy could increase his efforts during the battle, receiving reinforcements, and no one could come to the aid of the heroic partisans. The same fate befell the six Leningrad partisan regiments. But most of all, the partisans suffered when trying to "drive the Germans into the cold", as this made it possible for the invaders to involve the population in the protection of settlements. At the same time, partisan formations with well-trained commanders, such as S. Kovpak, G. Linkov, Eremchuk, F. Danilov, and others, successfully operated behind enemy lines without setting fire to villages occupied by the Germans. Particularly indicative are the actions of the partisan formation of F. D. Gnezdilov, who, being wounded, ended up behind enemy lines. Having recovered, he formed a small detachment from the encircled and, armed with weapons picked up on the battlefields and skillfully acting, by the beginning of 1942 he commanded the regiment "F. Dzerzhinsky. On February 23, this regiment was renamed the regiment named after the 24th anniversary of the Red Army, and by April 1942 it had 2363 people. If in 1937-1938 all measures for the

deployment of a partisan war in the event of enemy aggression had not been eliminated, then the Soviet partisans would have cut off the enemy troops from their sources of supply, and the aggressor would not have reached the Dnieper. If in the course of the war Stalin had been

guided by Lenin's position that partisan actions were not revenge, but military operations, then the leadership of the partisan forces would have been entrusted not to underground party bodies, but to military specialists who would plan the partisan movement and comprehensively provide the partisans. In fact, there was no unified leadership of the partisan forces: there were cases when some recruited partisans into detachments, while others destroyed them. The partisans did not receive the funds they needed.

Their needs for sabotage were not met even by 10%. During the war years, the partisans did not receive even 500 tons of explosives, and at the same time they carried out over 18 thousand train wrecks, for almost half a year in 1943-1944. disabled the railway section Ternopil-Shepetovka. For the delivery of goods, the partisans were not allocated

the required number of aircraft, and hundreds of tons of bombs were dropped with little efficiency on enemy railways ...

In May 1943, the planes of the 16th Air Army dropped about 500 tons of bombs on the Orel-Bryansk section, but the movement of trains was not completely stopped.

Chapter

8 Ivan Mikhailovich Dobryakov (continued)

He recalled the stories of Kretova, as well as the stories of the partisans, whom they met behind enemy lines when they delivered ammunition to them. And what they didn't do there and how they didn't get there, he recalled, but all this was on their territory, and here he is sitting in the basement of a city unfamiliar to him, where the population does not know the Russian language and for decades was brought up in the spirit of hatred for the Soviet state .

He also recalled that the Hungarians during the civil war against foreign interventionists and the White Guards in 1918–1921 participated in the struggle for Soviet power, created Soviets in their own country, and when the Francoist intervention in Spain began, thousands of them led by Mate The Zalka came to the aid of the Spanish Republic.

He recalled that not only partisan detachments, consisting of Soviet people, but also Spaniards, as well as Hungarians, Slovaks, and even Germans, were operating behind enemy lines on our territory. Many of the Spaniards with groups went behind enemy lines several times on different fronts. He knew that the Spaniard Francisco Gullon commanded a partisan detachment named after him. K. E. Voroshilov in the temporarily occupied territory of the Leningrad Region, where the Spanish fascist "blue division" labored ingloriously. Dobryakov recalled the books he

had read about Russian partisan actions abroad during the campaigns of Suvorov, the campaign of Russian troops in France after the defeat of Napoleon in Russia.

"But in those days," he thought, "it was easier for partisans to operate behind enemy lines. There was no damned Gestapo, no solid front." He recalled Kretova's

story that many partisans, having united with the troops of the Soviet Army, sought to be sent back behind enemy lines. And when they were told that almost the entire Soviet Union had been liberated and soon there would be no

there will be not a single enemy soldier, they asked for Poland, Czechoslovakia, and some - for Hungary, Romania and even Germany. There, -

they said, - there are also mountains and forests, and our friends will be found. If, - they said, - in the First World War, Russian soldiers, escaping from captivity, went all over Germany without weapons, then with weapons and with our experience we will be able to derail trains on their territory. And some have made it his.

From everything he read and heard about escapes from captivity, about the military affairs of partisans behind enemy lines, Dobryakov tried to remember the tactics of their actions: how they moved, hid, got food, conducted reconnaissance and fought the enemy. But, unfortunately, he used to prefer to listen to something else. He did not think about the possibility of partisan operations behind enemy lines on

his territory. Remembering individual episodes where there were interesting tactics, he began to fantasize. He already saw himself in the forest, where Temkin, Kretova and their commander, Captain Buntsev, were waiting for him, with whom he would break through the front line and report to his unit. Inspired by the stories of the partisans, iridescent thoughts were replaced by gloomy ones. It seemed to Dobryakov that the unfamiliar city was filled with Nazi troops, Gestapo

men, and traitors. "This is how ridiculous it turns out," he thought, "soon the war ends, and I'm here alone behind enemy lines, in an abandoned basement. As soon as the Nazis find out, life is over, all dreams of studying, of the future, have disappeared. And how mother, sisters and two little brothers will cry, especially if they find out that they are "missing".

He began to recall how the hero of Nikolai Ostrovsky Korchagin overcame difficulties. "I

am a member of the Komsomol," thought Dobryakov, "and Lenin taught how to overcome all difficulties, and he himself showed examples of how they should

be overcome." And he saw the image of Lenin, whose portrait he carried with him along with photographs of their relatives and girlfriend.

Soon he fell asleep unnoticed. In a dream, I dreamed of partisans, a battle near Budapest, then some snakes. I dreamed how he

lost his way in the forest near his village, and when night fell he did not know where to hide, he was worried about the experiences of his mother.

Finally, Dobryakov saw a huge bear in a dream. The beast slowly walked towards him. He tried to run, but his legs would not obey. The bear was approaching. From fright, Dobryakov woke up and raised his stiff head. It was heavy, like lead. In the darkness, he heard a squeak, fuss, and remembered with horror where he was and what had happened to him. Stretching his legs, he slowly stood up. There were no cracks in the window opening. "What is this? Night, or was I walled up while I was sleeping?" thought

He.

The clock on his arm ticked steadily, but he did not dare to strike a match. Quietly I went along the wall and with difficulty found the half-blocked window with my fingers. Has stopped.

"Where is the sentry, what time is it? How is the city protected? How to get to the collection point? As many as three unknowns. He

listened to the night rustles, did not find anything suspicious and decided to go out. Fixed the weapon. Once again I listened, the sentry was not heard. And he carefully selected some bricks and climbed out of the cellar. He breathed in the fresh night air, listened, carefully and noiselessly crawled away from the house.

It was dark, drizzling light rain, and Dobryakov quietly crawled along the wet grass, realizing that if they find him, he is dead. Finally he was in the bushes and was able to rest. The engines of some cars hummed in the city, and, what was especially disturbed by the distant barking of dogs.

There were no signs of people or dogs in the garden. Having landed with a parachute, Dobryakov lost his bearings and now decided to go in the direction where there were fewer car horns, assuming that the largest number of cars was either in the city center or on the highway. Silently he approached the fence, but, hearing the rumble of engines, did not overcome it. Soon a car with dimmed headlights and a high awning passed by. Before she had time to hide, Dobryakov heard the clatter of forged boots. The mechanic had three grenades at the ready and a machine gun with an incomplete disk of cartridges, but he froze and betrayed his presence in no way. The German platoon passed

past the pilot.

"Eh! - he thought, - there is nowhere to go, otherwise he would have treated grenade, but slashed from a machine gun, so few people would have stayed.

And the downcast, apparently tired soldiers had already passed by without any security measures. They felt completely safe. The roar of the engine was heard again. Dobryakov was unbearably thirsty, and he returned to the dilapidated house, but found no water. He went up to the fence again and, not noticing anything suspicious, quietly climbed over it, quickly ran across the street, jumped over another low fence and found himself again in the garden. In the depths of a large garden stood a lonely house. A bright light shone through the cracks in the shutters. "Well, dregs," thought Dobryakov. "I also ran across the street, but here you can't even walk through the garden, but I have to hurry

so that I can be in the forest by morning." And he went along the fence. This, although doubling the path to

the next street, but it was safer, he realized.

He walked slowly, stopped and listened. When he came to the fence overlooking the next street, which he had to cross, he stopped and distinctly heard the sounds of a waltz. There were no signs of protection. Ivan Mikhailovich decided to go to the house and look for water. The closer he crept up to the house, the louder the voices and music came. Here he noticed a barrel under the drainpipe. Thirst overcame caution, the pilot carefully approached the boiler and began to drink water. Before he had time to drink, the door opened and a German officer with a woman came out of the house. The Nazi turned on an electric flashlight and the rays of light began to wander around the garden. It was impossible to run. Dobryakov froze in place, preparing for battle. But, fortunately, no one noticed him. Cheerfully chatting, the couple went to the exit. After sitting out, the mechanic went to the fence, not noticing anything suspicious, climbed over it and found himself on the street. He listened and quietly, but quickly, passed through it. But the

next fence was so high that he could not overcome it. Footsteps and conversation were heard in the distance - someone was walking along the street. There was nowhere to go, and Dobryakov crossed the street again, hid behind the fence in the garden, where he drank water. He walked along the fence until the impenetrable fence ended opposite. Crossed the street once more, overcame

low fence and got into another vast overgrown garden. He did not find anything suspicious in it and quickly, unnoticed by anyone, reached the opposite side of the site, but he could not cross the street. A high white fence was visible

ahead, and against its background the pilot noticed the first patrol. He stopped in thought. The silence of the night was suddenly broken by heart-rending cries, swearing, urging cries. Dobryakov's sharp hearing distinctly distinguished Russian words dear to him, intertwined with groans and cries. The mechanic's skin went cold. "Bastards. No torture, he thought. Soon

the massive gates opened, and the lights of a car appeared in the distance, from which faint groans and rare loud cries of the Germans could be heard. Coming out of the gate, the car stopped on the road, only six meters from the lurking mechanic. Then a passenger car appeared, and a terrible van drove after it. Dobryakov was numb. In front of his eyes, the Nazis took away the car with their victims, and he, an armed pilot, is hiding in the dark and does nothing to save the unfortunate, who, perhaps, went on their last journey in a closed car. When the terrible cars disappeared, the onboard mechanic, shocked by what he saw, tried to get out of the garden, but to no avail: either patrols or cars walked along the street. With horror, he noticed that it was dawning. The long night passed very quickly for him. During the whole night he only got drunk and moved from one garden to another. If they don't wait for him at the assembly point, what will he do without a map, without food? There were no shelters in the yard and garden, except for thickets of bushes. Dobryakov chose the thickest bushes and settled down in them for the day. Soon he felt cold, especially where his

clothes were soaked. Dobryakov laid a dry newspaper between his wet clothes and the body, ate the remnants of his emergency supply and curled up. The day seemed extremely long to him, as if the earth had stopped moving around its axis. But he had to lie still so as not to betray his presence in any way.

Until noon everything went well, and he was already getting used to his position. Weakness from fatigue, nervous tension was felt. The crackers had already been eaten, and the juicy, slightly bitter grass had to be chewed. He wanted to sleep, but he understood that this was impossible, and he considered various plans. At noon, the Nazis, who were in a neighboring house, drove horses into the garden and

began to graze them. So close, Dobryakov saw enemy soldiers only in photographs, and prisoners. And here they are - alive, cheerful, with weapons - were very close and had fun with the horses.

Perhaps they were soldiers of the rear transport unit who had never been in combat. Perhaps they had children, cursed Hitler and the war he started. But if these soldiers were 2nd category wagon convoys, they were no less dangerous for Dobryakov hiding in the thickets than the tankers of the "tigers". If any of the careless-looking soldiers, on any business, enters

the bush where the pilot was hiding, then he could not be saved.

"If you send one or two wagon-carriers to the other world, everything will end there, and he disappeared without a trace," thought Dobryakov. From such reflections, his drowsy mood was swept away like a hand.

However, fortunately for him, the Nazis did not go through the bushes, but indulged themselves and left the garden, leaving the horses to graze. At last it became evening. Again the groomsmen came for their horses. And it was necessary at that time for one horse to approach the thicket, where the board was hiding mechanic.

"Really," he thought, "the horse will betray me before will it get dark and I will become invisible again?"

Dobryakov leaned silently towards the horse, poked it in the head with a twig, and it reluctantly leaned back and walked away from the bushes. After dark, the pilot crawled out of the

bushes and began to climb out of the garden. We had to hurry to the forest to the assembly point. Today was the last date for the meeting. He walked around the white stone wall from which the heart-rending cries of the previous night had come. Only in the second half of the night did he manage to get out to the outskirts. "Where to go next? Where is the forest? Today I will not get to the assembly point without a map, he thought.

If earlier Dobryakov considered the main task to get out of the city occupied by the enemy and turn up at the assembly point, then, having gone to the outskirts, by the end of the night he had already lost time and did not dare to go through an area unknown to him, fearing that he was late and dawn would find him where cannot be safely hidden. And he decided to spend one more day in the city. He was seduced by a lonely barn. There were no dogs, no Nazis nearby. The barn was open. One half is stuffed with fragrant hay, the other half is filled with straw. Scrap metal was neatly stacked near the barn.

On top lay a German
metal helmet.

Dobryakov carefully entered the barn and climbed into the most remote corner, littered with straw. In the morning

in the courtyard he heard a conversation, the cries of children. In addition to the Hungarians, the Germans apparently also came to the yard. Their abrupt, guttural speech clearly differed from that of the Hungarians. Among the inhabitants of the courtyard, he heard a pleasant girlish voice. Nobody entered the shed. In the afternoon, the tired Dobryakov could not overcome his drowsiness and fell asleep. In the dream, he was working in the fields, threshing wheat, inhaling the wonderful smell of fresh straw. Slept for at least five hours. When he woke up, he remembered that he was behind enemy lines, and in his heart he scolded himself for his carelessness. It was already dark and quiet. The pilot went to the barn door, but could not open it, it was locked from the

What was the purpose of locking up the barn? Maybe he was seen sleeping and, locked the door, ran to inform the Nazis? "Here's a fool, overslept," thought Dobryakov. After examining

the gate, he found that from above through them you can get out. The pilot silently climbed onto the upper edge of the doors, squeezed them out a little and, thanks to good sports training, pulled himself up on his hands and found himself free. "Before you leave the city, you need to stock up on food,"

thought Dobryakov. "But how do you address strangers?"

He knows German very poorly and only a few phrases, and only a few words in Hungarian. This means that they can immediately expose and hand over to the enemy. "But," he recalled, "there are soldiers of various nationalities in the enemy army. It would be nice if I introduced myself as one of them. Just needs an explanation

do not use Russian words. Now, it is necessary to somehow change the shape," the mechanic decided.

He remembered the German helmet lying near the scrap metal, but with disgust he refused even the thought of putting it

on. Dobryakov knew that scouts often use the uniform of the enemy, this sometimes helps them out of difficult situations, and the partisans were forced to wear it due to the lack of another.

"I can do without a uniform. I'll turn my headpiece back to front and I'll get by with that," thought Dobryakov, heading towards the house.

It was completely dark outside. He went to the window and watched. Weak light filtered through cracks in the shutters. In the house, occasionally, a man, an elderly woman, and a girl with a pleasant voice spoke to each other in a language he did not understand. There were no Germans in the house. Dobryakov knocked on the window. The owner asked something, but he did not answer. The light in the room went out. Soon he knocked again. The fear of the owner to

leave the house reassured Dobryakov. So, he was not mistaken: there were no Nazis in the house. Then he knocked on the window again, and when the host again asked some question in German, answered:

- They're a soldier. This time, a tall, well-built elderly man in blue overalls came out of the house. He stood for a moment, shifting from foot to foot, apparently getting used to the darkness, then repeated his question in German. "Ikh soldat," the pilot repeated and gestured that he wants to eat. -

Rus? the owner suddenly asked. Dobryakov mechanically nodded his head and immediately realized that he had done wrong, had given himself away to an unknown person. The owner signaled to wait and soon came out with a slender girl, apparently his daughter. She gave Ivan a slice of bread, boiled corn and a small piece of lard.

Then she quickly spread her hands to the side, repeating sadly "grossnain, grossnain." Dobryakov put

everything in his pocket, thanked him for the food as best he could and was so moved that he turned his cap over and

showed the owners a red star.

- Rus. Bun Council. Lenin bun, - the girl said somehow touchingly and gave a sign that he was waiting for her. A minute later she came out with a bottle of wine and a bag of dried fruit and handed them to Ivan.

Chapter

9 Dogs

In the darkness of the night, Buntsev and Kretova with difficulty reached the assembly point, but they did not find anyone there. After sitting in the young pines during the day, with the onset of dark time, they again began to look for their own, but to no avail. No one answered the prearranged signals, and there were no signs of the presence of people. Buntsev could not come to terms with the idea that Temkin and Dobryakov would not come and decided to stay in the forest for another day. This time we settled down for the day at the edge of the forest, having the opportunity to observe the approaches to the forest. The second day seemed tiresomely long. The concern for the missing friends made itself

felt. In the afternoon Kretova fell asleep. Soon a small herd of cows and sheep grazing in the field came close to the forest, and two shepherds, an old man and a boy, settled down on the edge and began to have a snack. They had a dog with them. Buntsev watched the meal from a distance, trying not to move. He was very afraid that the dog would find them, and not without reason. The dog, sensing strangers, pricked up its ears and began to bark in the direction of the location of the pilot and radio operator. No matter how soundly Kretova slept, she heard the barking of a dog and woke up. "We'll have to move further into the forest," the radio operator suggested. "We could still try to neutralize the shepherds, but it's hard to neutralize the damned dog silently. "But you can't wait until she calms down either." And they began to quietly retreat into the depths of the

forest. Buntsev and Kretova came to a small clearing surrounded by bushes. Here they stopped. "Today we will leave here without warning our people that we have been here and where we are going." You can't write on a tree, and we didn't agree to leave it under a tree, and there aren't very many trees here," Buntsev added. - Agreed, did not agree, but I Vanya Dobryakov

told how we established communication through mailboxes.

"But they are not here.

"It will have to be done, that's all. We can leave a note under this big oak at the collection point.

- And how to tell that there is a note? "Let's put rotten things that shine at night, and a note under them. I also spoke about such methods. After waiting for the evening,

Buntsev and Kretova went east. They walked, looking and listening intently. An hour later, a small farm or estate appeared ahead. They came closer and stopped. They listened. Soon a car drove out of the farm. We quickly moved away from the country road and lay down. The car passed by with a masked light.

- Here the partisans would have captured it for sure, but we missed such booty, whispered Kretova.

Peering into the farm, they concluded that it was actually not a farm, but an estate, beyond which begins either a forest or a park.

"Shouldn't we go through the estate?" Look how they live carelessly, said Kretova. And as if in

response they heard the barking of dogs in the estate. "Here you are, Olga, and noted," Buntsev whispered. "It's all right, Comrade Captain. Let's go around and as soon as we will reach the right road, we will go in the direction of our own.

And they went. The dogs calmed down at times, then again barked.

It was already well after midnight, and after waiting for the traffic to stop, they crossed the road and went to look for a place for a day's rest. We walked until dawn and, not finding anything better, stopped for the day again in the harvested, but not mowed corn.

A fine autumn rain was drizzling, but they settled tolerably on damp ground, using a parachute for bedding.

Chapter 10

"Languages"

The short autumn day seemed to Buntsev and Kretova, like all days behind enemy lines, incredibly long. At first, both of them could not fall asleep for a long time, then, as it was established according to the schedule, Kretova fell asleep, and the captain gave her the opportunity to rest, protecting her sleep. Only when Buntsev began to feel so sleepy that there was a danger of succumbing to the temptation to fall asleep, taking advantage of the fact that no one could be heard nearby, did he wake Kretova. Now, overcoming sleep, Olga was awake. And although it was already time to prepare for the night exit, she did not wake her commander until it was dark. "For four days now we have been behind enemy lines," said Olga. - Yes, time flies, and we still do not even

hear signs of the front line. The whole trouble is that we do not know where ours are advancing now -

replied the captain.

- Or maybe we should rush north to the Slovak partisans? From there we will contact our own people, and we will be evacuated by air, just as we once evacuated the wounded partisans," Kretova suggested.

- You, Olga, are drawn to the partisans. Where are we going to find them? No! We'd better go to meet our troops. It's more true. On the way of the "language" we will catch and clarify the situation along the way.

"But we have already got used to the rear of the enemy a little and we can ourselves create a partisan detachment in the mountains," Kretova objected.

- No, Olga, rather to the unit, and there again the plane and - to bomb the enemy. After all, it was not for nothing that our Tolya Temkin used to say: - fish need water, and pilots need the sky. Let's go to the base through the front - resolutely

concluded the captain.

After supper, they packed up their heavy possessions, which seemed to them heavy, and set off on their way to the east. About three hours later, they approached the highway, along which small columns of automobiles and single cars occasionally passed.

- The road is right for us. Let's go at a distance so that we can't be seen, but so that we can see what's going on on the road -

suggested Kretova, and the captain agreed.

Walking on soft, wet ground was tiring. I wanted to sit down and rest. And along the road the lights of cars flickered, motorcycles occasionally rushed by, and no one detained anyone, no one stopped anyone, no one, apparently, guarded the road. Walking through the field, they came across a wire fence separating two adjacent plots.

earth.

"A wonderful find," Kretova exclaimed in a whisper. - What did you find? Buntsev asked. - A thorn, a real thorn. - And what is she to you? - Let's try to catch

the language, but ride in a car. Are you thinking about being weird again? Rest for a minute and I'll take a look. Buntsev was already

tired and therefore willingly agreed to rest. A brisk radio operator quickly found the end of one wire and began to tear it off the half-rotted stakes. The job was not easy. Her hands were already covered in blood, but she stubbornly tore off the wire. Seeing her perseverance, the captain got involved in the work, and after ten minutes they already had about 30 meters of small pieces of good-quality barbed wire. "Well, what are you going

to do with them now?" - Catch the "language", yes, maybe we'll catch the car. Here ahead appeared the lights of a single car. Kretova quickly laid out pieces of barbed wire across the road, disguising it with grass. They stepped aside and lay down. Lying on the damp ground, Buntsev and Kretova, with bated breath, watched the lights of the approaching car. We didn't have to wait long.

"This time the fate of my experience is being decided," thought Kretova. The car swerved, slowed down and stopped. The pilots looked at each other. Kretova's heart skipped a beat. "Hurry, hurry," she whispered.

Approaching the car for 100 meters, in the headlights they saw that the driver had already jacked up the car and was removing the damaged ramp. On the side stood a medium-sized soldier, nonchalantly watching the work of the driver. There was no light in the car, and Buntsev was afraid that other Nazis could be there.

Everything worked out for the pilots in the best possible way: there was no one on the road, the driver was busy with work, a lone military man was standing, visible in the light of sidelights. Buntsev and Kretova cautiously crept up to the car. At this time, a tall military man got out of the car. The soldier started up and stood at attention. All this was visible

pilots left in the dark.

"Big boss," thought Buntsev. He, too, was fascinated by the idea of capturing language. The Nazis were clearly visible. There were no signs of movement on the road. The car door was open and no one got out.

Suddenly, two short bursts pierced the stillness of the night. Behind them shout:

"Hyundai hoh!" Two Nazis sprawled on the road, and the driver stood with his hands up. When Buntsev and Kretova ran up to the car, the driver asked for something in a trembling voice, turning to Kretova. The soldier lay without signs of life. The officer, apparently wounded in the stomach and leg, was lying on the ground. When Buntsev illuminated him with a pocket torch, he tossed and turned, trying to draw his pistol, but Buntsev got ahead of him and disarmed him. Now they are busy with the driver. Kretova quickly searched him, took the pistol out of its holster and put it in her pocket.

"And now, so that he does not run away, we will tie his legs and hands," said Kretova.

"Only faster. Buntsev pulled out his trouser belt, tore off the buttons, and now the driver stood with his hands up and his trousers down. Buntsev showed the driver to put his hands behind his back, and quickly and firmly tied them with a trouser belt. The driver has now been disabled. Leaving the radio operator with the bound driver,

Buntsev carefully searched the unconscious major, took off his overcoat, tunic and headgear, dragged him and the soldier's corpse into a ditch and covered them with a soldier's overcoat. The driver was put into the car on the floor in front of the

seat, on which Olga was comfortably seated. When everything was ready, Buntsev switched on the clutch, started the engine, the obedient Mercedes smoothly moved forward.

- Olga, what are we going to do with the "boiled tongue"? Buntsev asked.
"Let's
go to the side and we'll see." Will not answer - there will be kaput. The

captured driver understood what the conversation was about, and in broken Russian began to ask that he not be killed. - And the
"language", it turns out, understands us, apparently, visited our earth, Kretova noticed.

Towards appeared the lights of a column coming from the east. - Olya, there is a column ahead. There is nowhere to turn. "Let's go on a collision course," said the radio operator. Increasing speed, he went to approach the column. "Will they stop?" both thought. -

Olga, make sure that the "tongue" does not take it into his head to betray us. "He won't peep from me if he wants to live,"

Kretova answered. When the first car flashed past, Buntsev slowed down the gas and felt complete confidence in the successful outcome of the meeting with the column. Cars were carrying broken equipment, some of them were ridden by soldiers, apparently guards.

Having missed the column, Buntsev stopped the car near a small bridge. There was a stream below. It was still four

hours before dawn, but Buntsev felt so tired as he drove his car past a large convoy in an oncoming course that he already had the idea of throwing the car under the bridge into the stream. But he immediately put that thought aside and decided to use the machine as much as he could. Resting, he began to examine the documents. Among them was a map with a communication diagram. They asked for language. He confirmed the assumption. The murdered Major Hauser was indeed an officer in the signal troops. At this time, Kretova turned on the receiver.

They spoke German. She began to look for another wave, and suddenly, oh my God, her native language! She was ready to hug and kiss the receiver.

"It's too early to leave the car, the map with the communication scheme must be delivered to our people as soon as possible," Buntsev said and drove forward along the road, which, according to his orientation, led to the front line. "And listen to the latest news," Olya said.

Soon the lights of cars appeared ahead. There were more and more of them. The column began to move, turning on the camouflaged headlights. "Suspicious stop. Checkpoint",

-

he thought.

"We'll have to turn 180 degrees from the gate," he said, and turning the car around, drove in the opposite direction, looking for the exit to the side. Before reaching the bridge where they stopped, he turned right onto a country road, and stopped, turning off his headlights. A column of troops passed by without suspecting anything.

This is not your motorcycle. You can't hide with such a transport," Buntsev muttered, looking at the car. - We drove a little on it, but you can't get enough trouble with it.

He looked at his watch - it was already 3:30 local time. It was about three hours before sunrise. The road was every minute. There was only one way out - to immediately get rid of the car and get as far away from the road as possible and settle down in a shelter for a day. - Olga! Tell me, like an experienced

partisan, where to put the car in order to get rid of it. "Smash it against a pole on the road,

and throw it," the girl answered. "It's not so easy to smash it against a pole without breaking yourself. - Well, just hit a little, maybe someone will pick it up. "Let's try to drive along a country road, maybe we'll find a convenient place to get rid of her," Buntsev suggested and drove away from the main road. Soon silhouettes of houses appeared in the

darkness. There was a village ahead. Orienting on the map, the captain found that they were not far from the dam.

He drove a little further, and indeed ahead the road passed along the dam, but, unfortunately, it was lined with stone pillars on the sides, so it was impossible to lower the car down the slope. And time passed, the clock showed already 4.20 local time. Buntsev decided to drive ahead to look for an exit to the dam, and soon he found it. But when he began to turn the car around, an armed man in a paramilitary uniform ran out of the village, he was shouting something in Hungarian.

"It wasn't enough yet," the captain said aloud. The man ran, holding the rifle in his hand like a stick. Buntsev prepared for the meeting. An armed man ran up, panting, and began to explain in broken German that there was no road to where the car had been turned. Suspecting nothing, the guard stood with his rifle lowered to his foot and waited for instructions, mistaking them for the Germans. Quickly assessing the physical capabilities of the enemy, Buntsev knocked out the guard with a strong blow.

"To finish off an enemy soldier who has been knocked to the ground," Buntsev thought, "but they will find a corpse, and there is a pursuit in the tracks, it is difficult to hide during the day, there are no forests. A corpse can bring death, and a living guard can give valuable information.

"Olga, quickly process this eccentric, put a gag in his mouth, and tie his hands and tangle his legs until he wakes up," ordered captain.

The prisoner came to his senses before Kretova managed to bring him to a safe state. He said something, but the radio operator so impressively showed him that he was silent, otherwise he would be kaput, that he closed his mouth and obediently let his hands be tied and his legs confused.

"Amazing! Such a steep descent that we can now drown the car and leave," thought Buntsev. And when Kretova finished with the guard, the captain took the confused driver out, took his greatly increased property, turned the car around, disengaged the clutch and, resting against it, directed it down the slope to the pond. Seeing the car picking up speed slip into the water, the captive driver screamed, and his face was such horror as if she had driven through him. The limousine disappeared from sight, only the bubbles rising to the surface still reminded of a drowned car.

A large farm remained on the shore - two prisoners, an excess weapons, remnants of food and two soaked German overcoats.

"Comrade Captain, let's go along the stream, it's easier to hide the tracks here and you can find some shelter sooner, there are less than two hours left before dawn." We'll have to unravel the prisoner, otherwise you won't get far with them. "We'll tie them together," suggested Olga. The prisoners were tied together, loaded with extra weapons without cartridges, two overcoats heavy from dampness and went.

Kretova walked in front, followed by prisoners tightly bound with wire. Buntsev brought up the rear.

Five kilometers from the dam, they found a small peninsula overgrown with shrubs. There we decided to stop for a day, having previously confused the traces.

"No one will come here without work," Buntsev thought, "and it's convenient to defend here."

They settled down for the day and the captain noticed that the balance of power was not in their favor - when one of them rested, both prisoners could be awake.

Having eaten with the prisoners, Buntsev and Kretova began interrogating the "tongues". The stout, fair-haired, open-faced driver of Signal Corps Major Karl Westphal, who was of average height, turned out to be an Austrian. According to him, he participated in the Vienna uprising, after the arrival of the Nazis he worked underground, his older brother died in 1937 in Spain in the war against the Nazis, whom he hated, but he had to serve them. His father was a prisoner in Russia, where he learned to speak Russian well, from him the children learned not only to speak a little Russian, but also to respect the people who overthrew the autocracy and the landowners and capitalists. Karl assured that he dreamed of getting to Russia, but the damned Nazis came, and everything turned upside down. He went to work in Germany, where he got married in Chemnitz.

- I understand, - he said, that you can not trust me, but give me a case and I will show, - Karl finished his biography. Then he told everything he knew about the situation in the rear and at the front.

"That's it, the fascist army, there are many animals in it that cannot be spared, but there are also those that can be pardoned," thought Buntsev. The

driver could still come in handy. It was more difficult with the Hungarian guard. He did not understand German well, and Buntsev and Kretova knew very little Hungarian words, but they also found an opportunity to explain themselves to him, using Karl as

an interpreter. At first, the prisoner did not so much answer on the merits of the questions asked, but scolded Hitler, the Nazis, Salashi. It turned out that the prisoner mistook them for Soviet intelligence officers.

The bold actions and uniforms of the Soviet pilots left no doubts among the prisoners.

From the hard-won testimonies of the prisoners, they established that there were still about 40 kilometers to the front line, that all settlements were guarded by the enemy even where there were no his troops, defensive work was being intensively carried out in many places, that partisans were operating in the rear, attacking even on the Gestapo. The prisoners asked them not to be killed. The guard even cried. As the pilots understood, he was very worried about his family, who were waiting for him for breakfast in the morning, and the Austrian was still grieving

about the drowned car. "Thousands and thousands of wonderful people are dying in the fight against the Nazis, and here one thinks about a failed homemade breakfast, and the other thinks about a drowned car," Buntsev remarked.

Buntsev and Kretova began to "agitate" the prisoners. They told them a lot and proved with gestures that the fascists had already lost the war and everyone who did not jump off the sinking fascist ship in time would drown with it. There is very little time left, and we must hurry to take part in the fight against the Nazis.

The guard listened indifferently and looked at their gestures, but either did not understand, or was thinking about something else. Karl behaved quite differently. He offered his services: to show on the map, which was in the officer's field bag, where the headquarters, airfields were located - and offered to lead scouts there, and for everything he asked not to kill him, to take him prisoner. My father and other Austrians who were prisoners of war in Russia during the First World War praised the attitude of the Russians towards

them. A conversation took place between the pilots and the captured driver, the meaning of which was as follows:

"Russians are kind and right people," the prisoner said. - They are brave warriors and did not mock the prisoners, and not like the Americans.

When he spoke about the Americans, his face expressed a clear hatred.

- What about the Americans? the captain asked. "The Americans are bombing housing, not real military installations. Either they are afraid of anti-aircraft guns, or they deliberately drop bombs on the

working outskirts. - But you complain about the Americans, and the Nazis destroyed innocent civilians, burning them in ovens, killing them in gas chambers,

driving them to starvation. You did not protest against this, but drove an officer in your car, and, the devil knows, maybe you were on our land with him and ...
- No, no, - the driver interrupted him, - I

was not on your land, but how could I protest when for the slightest protest - death. And I have two young children. Therefore, I was silent, shouted, as everyone shouted, "Heil Hitler!", But I am a worker, I understood that Hitler deceived some Austrians, intimidated others, and destroyed others. He promised us mountains of gold, and his satraps took everything. They took everything into their own hands, and as I was a worker, I remained. Before Hitler, I could still talk, feel like a man, and Hitler's Nazism made us obedient dummies, and many thousands of Austrians laid down their heads or went missing to make the rulers of the new empire even richer. Yes, and "Heil" shouted that he was dead, and went to their gatherings. And if I didn't go, I wouldn't be alive now. Those who did not shout "Heil" died in prisons, but among those who shouted and went to gatherings, there were those who quickly regained their sight from fascist demagoguery, there were also those who walked and shouted along with the fascists, but worked underground. "But the end of fascism is already visible, and there are still many fools from those to whom fascism could bring nothing but hard labor, who still defend Hitlerism going to the grave," noted

captain.

- Yes, there are fools and a lot. Previously, they were fascinated by the prospect of becoming masters, but now they are frightened by extermination by the Reds, spreading tales that the Reds will either destroy all Germans or drive them to Siberia and there they die of hunger and exhaustion.

And do they believe

it? "The fact of the matter is that they believe. And how not to believe! How much grief and misfortune was brought by the war started by Hitler, how many thousands of civilians were barbarously destroyed where the Nazis appeared. Therefore, many are afraid, some are afraid that the Russians will not spare either the guilty or the right, others are afraid because they themselves or their children and husbands destroyed innocent civilians.

- It's all rubbish! Nonsense! The perpetrators of our and your troubles will suffer their well-deserved punishment, but the innocent and deceived have nothing to fear, - said Buntsev and, looking carefully at the prisoner,

added: That's it, Carl. Russians are not vindictive. We destroy the enemy only when he does not surrender, but we do not touch the prisoners. You will live if you do not take it into your head to run away or give us away by shouting and other actions. Then beware: I shoot accurately. The prisoner squirmed

in gratitude. "No, I won't bother you, I'll help you,"

he said firmly. "But by helping us, you will thereby harm the Nazi army. - Yes. I have

no return to the fascist army. I'll be charged and hanged for the major's murder.

"Well, if you managed to betray us, then you will not only not be hanged, on the contrary, you will be

rewarded. The prisoner was even offended and said: "The major was unfair to me. He often humiliated me.

Karl was very sorry that his car was drowned, he would have carried Russians on it. When Buntsev began to explain to him that in a car they could not pass through checkpoints and settlements - they could be detained, the driver explained: a pass was put on the front windshield on the left. Signs were put on the body on the right and left that the car belonged to the signal troops, and they were never stopped anywhere and no one checked their documents. - I know well where and how to get there so that they don't detain or even stop. Four years went with different officers. There were thoughts of leaving for the partisans, but I was afraid: they would take the car away, and they would shoot me.

Buntsev and Kretova, after listening to the prisoner, looked at each other - they both thought about one thing: whether the

Austrian was lying. "Well, why didn't you tell me about it right away?" Now would were already with the partisans or fled closer to the front line.

- Yes, as you grabbed me, I did not immediately come to my senses. I thought you could manage without my help. But you can also get another car that suits you, and you know how to do it.

- It is not always and not everywhere easy to get cars, as you think, the captain noted. - If you help us, then it will probably be easier to get a car.

"Of course I will help. I will do whatever you say.

Are you thinking of becoming a partisan? the captain asked. - Oh yeah! I'll help the partisans, and then I'll learn myself," Karl answered convincingly that one could believe in the sincerity of his words.

"A partisan involuntarily," Buntsev thought, and decided to take him. - There are a lot of things going on. Let him wear it for now, and then it will be seen," he

decided. - Amazing! He wants to fight against Hitler. So we will give him that opportunity. Let's change him into a major, then he can be useful, - suggested Kretova. - You, Olya, all for your partisan

tricks. And perhaps it's really useful to have your own German major, "Buntsev supported him. When Kretova's proposal was explained to the captive

driver, he was sincerely frightened and began to convince that the major would not come out of him, and if he was caught in this uniform, they would certainly hang him. "That's what we need to make

him afraid of being caught
Hitlerites," thought Buntsev.

- Do you think that the Nazis will catch us, so they will have mercy? he asked Carl. - No! But we will not be hanged because we will not surrender alive. Once you have decided with us, then you can not retreat. If you are with us, then listen to us, and if you are against us, then ... We do not want you to get to the Nazis, but we want you to be a real major in the future free Germany, if necessary.

Many more pilots talked to Carl. They wanted to believe that he was telling them the truth, but they were not so naive as to believe the prisoner immediately without confirmation by deed. That's what

Carl is! Now we will make you a major, and then, for the sake of a fortress, we will put you to sleep tied up for the day. You understand yourself that we cannot believe you until you prove it by deed, and in the afternoon we cannot risk leaving an unverified person unbound hand and foot. So forgive us our vigilance.

And the pilots, having dressed the driver as a major, again tied his hands and feet. Captain Buntsev invited Kretova to rest, while he himself remained on duty.

Chapter

11 Punished Traitor

Saying goodbye to the kind-hearted Hungarians, Dobryakov, without incident, approached the forest in the morning - the place where the crew gathered. Here he saw a man among the bushes and immediately recognized him as his friend. There was no end to the joy. Two

people, exhausted by night crossings and experiences, settled down in those very young pines in which Kretova and Buntsev had been more than a day ago. Despite the hunger, they ate without appetite, drinking wine. In the afternoon, on one tree, Temkin noticed a cut with the letters S.B.O.K. and pointed them out to Dobryakov. The mechanic was delighted. They are alive and have been here. Right here, in this place. He began

looking under the tree for a note, but found nothing. Happy in

the forest and the approaches were calm.

The discovery of traces of the commander and the radio operator was so exciting friends that, despite being tired, they could not sleep.

"It is a pity that the traces break off. Where to look for them now? thought Dobryakov.

* * *

Covered with an overcoat and raincoat, the weary radio operator she slept soundly and did not hear the peals of the approaching cannonade.

To ensure her safety during his rest, Buntsev did not let the prisoners sleep. He was worried about the thought of what to do with the prisoners? Even unarmed, they are a danger: if an enemy appears, when it is necessary to freeze, they can betray them to the enemy with their noise, and in case of any mistake, even attack from behind. Now they lie tied up, perhaps trying not to betray their intentions in any way. There are three options: liquidate, leave tied up on the spot, take it with you and deliver it to the location of your troops, the captain thought so. But the first option

he immediately dropped; the enemy is destroyed when he does not surrender - this is an axiom of Soviet soldiers. Whether it was in your rear, there was no need to think. And here the enemy is all around, and the slightest

danger, a mistake can lead to death. Looking at the prisoners, Buntsev tried to penetrate their thoughts, to find out what they think, who they really are. He began to study their papers, but they told him little. In Karl's documents, he found him taken with his family, his wife and children separately, and many family photographs. There were pictures of Karl with some officers, he found letters, but he could not read them. The security guard's documents contained one ID and some kind of note, which the pilot also could not read. Having studied the documents, Buntsev tried to talk to Karl and the guard, but learned little new from the conversation. The prisoners as soon as possible scolded Hitler, Salash, the Nazis, but how to check how sincere it was.

Olga woke up and made the captain lie down to rest.

"Be careful, keep your eyes open, don't fall asleep in any case," Buntsev warned the radio operator.

- Be calm. Everything will be OK. I won't break. Forcing the prisoners to turn away and not turn in her direction, Kretova took up her partisan affairs. Putting things in order,

watching the sleepers, she sat down. But soon she was so sleepy that against her will she closed her eyes, bowing her head. For a second, she really passed out, but, catching herself on this, the girl opened her eyes with a huge effort of will. Glancing at the prisoners, she immediately noticed that the guard was not sleeping. Seeing that he was being watched, he shuddered and again pretended to be asleep. Olga's drowsiness vanished as if by magic. She decided to pretend and watch the prisoners. Putting her head more comfortably on the bag and covering her face with her hand, she could watch them unnoticed by the prisoners. For some time

the prisoners lay quietly and seemed to be sleeping, but then the guard opened one eye and, making sure that the sentry was sleeping, tried to free his hands, trying to rub the rope against a stone. Either the rope was weak, or the large stone lying near the guard was sharp, but he succeeded. Having freed his hands, the guard wanted to unravel his legs, but Karl prevented him. The prisoners were tied up

that first it was necessary to free Karl. When the guard began to untie the Austrian's legs, he woke up, and, realizing what was the matter, to the surprise of Kretova, who was ready to jump up and deal with the deceivers, did not allow himself to untie his legs, shaking his head negatively. The guard thought about something for a moment, then lay down next to Karl and began to whisper in his ear, but the captive driver continued to shake his head negatively. Turning away, the guard began to try to dig a stone out of the ground, but on this his activity was interrupted. Quickly jumping up, Kretova stunned the guard with her butt. The blow was so strong that he no longer regained consciousness.

Having finished with the guard, Olga listened - everything was quiet, the captain was sleeping. She continued to act as sentry, listening to the distant artillery barrage. And only when it began to get dark, she woke Buntsev and told him about the incident.

"That's where he's going," said the captain, looking down at the unconscious body. Buntsev went

down to the stream, washed himself and returned cheerful. "Well, don't you want to leave?" Captain Karla asked, to whom Olga freed his mouth, arms and legs, but he seemed somehow miserable in the uniform of a German major, which did not suit the former driver. "No,

I have nowhere to go," replied the Austrian. - Well done!

I didn't succumb to the provocation," Olga added. "All right, if so, then stay and help us," said Buntsev, turning to the Austrian and patting him on the shoulder.

A heavy bale of various property was loaded onto Karl, the pistol was returned to him and, leaving the guard and his rifle in place, they went towards the front line - to where the distant artillery cannonade came from.

Chapter

12 On the Front Roads

Two hours later, Buntsev and his group went to the main highway. At that time, a car column was moving along it in a westerly direction. Against the background of the sky from the ground, the silhouettes of cars filled with various cargo were clearly visible. "If vehicles loaded

with various property are coming from the front, then they are definitely retreating or preparing to retreat," Buntsev decided. But one had to look at the

column only from a distance, since two, although armed, people could not do anything with it. At last the long column passed. Everything seemed to stop on the road, only in the darkness of the night, somewhere low in the air, the unique sound of U-2 engines was heard. — Cornflowers. The kings of the night. Honestly,

they
Buntsev said happily. "The

road is passing us (we navigated during the forced downtime), the traffic is rare, we're so tired of dragging our feet through the mud, we'll take the risk of walking along the side of the road, maybe someone will get caught, with the help of Karl, we'll drop off and go ourselves," Olga Buntseva whispered.

It was convenient to walk along the hard shoulder, but only continuously. I had to look back so that the car would not suddenly catch up.

"Coming," the captain warned, noticing a faint light rapidly approaching from behind. A few seconds later, a

passenger car sped past the pedestrians lying behind the ditch. A minute later, a red light appeared in front of her. The car stopped. - Relocation.

There's a railroad on the map. Will have

to bypass. - Let's get around! This is not the first time for us,"

Buntsev replied cheerfully. Bypassing the crossing, the group went to the railway, 200 meters from
him.

- Everything is quiet! No signs of security, Olga whispered.
after a thorough study of the situation in the transition area.

Safely crossing the road, the group was about to leave, but, having heard the noise of a moving train in the distance, Buntsev decided to linger and find out what the train was carrying. Three minutes later, a military echelon passed by the group: a weak light burned in the passenger cars, vehicles and guns stood on 12 platforms. "Let him go downhill," said Olga.

"This one is already late, and we don't even have mines, and you won't derail a train with your bare hands," the captain answered. - When there is no guard, you can skillfully launch without a mine with the help of improvised means. Let's go in the direction of the crossing, look for a tool and "bomb" the train, - suggested Kretova.

- Olga! We have nothing to bomb with, and no one will put a tool on the road for us, and even if we found it, then with our strength and experience we would not separate the rails until morning.

- No! We don't need to separate them. There is an easy way, just to find a suitable rail, well, at least a rail three meters long. Then we would quickly bring the track into such a state that not a single train would have passed, "the radio operator answered. "But the trains are

lighting the way ahead and will notice your rail," the captain retorted. - We will not leave any rail

on the way, we will make everything more reliable. Well, let's take a little walk along the path away from the crossing and see. Maybe we can figure out how to "bomb" the train without bombs and mines.

Buntsev agreed and they went. -

What a find! - the radio operator stopped them, pointing to a small stack of rails, on which lay a piece of rail about four meters long. But when they tried to move him from his

place, it turned out that there were not enough forces ... Buntsev helped raise the rail. Kretova began to look for something else, and soon brought a stone weighing about a pood. — Look! A large column

approaches the crossing. This is a wonderful combination. We will work, and the crossing watchman will be busy with motor vehicles, Kretova said quietly, finally entering the role of a partisan. She explained the essence of the method. Buntsev quickly realized

what was the matter, and all three set to work. There was no security. had to

pause work, listen, peer into the darkness. But the car column slowly walked through the crossing, and three pairs of hands were preparing to meet the next enemy train. When the work was finished, again all three froze,

listened, and the column still continued to go.

"If the guards don't find it, the train will definitely go off the rails," the radio operator answered confidently. But finally the

column passed, and the group headed for the highway. On it occasionally passed individual vehicles. But it didn't take long to get on the road. In the distance, two lights appeared, which approached faster and faster, and it became clear that these were the headlights of two motorcycles. Behind him appeared the lights of cars. The caravan was moving again. I had to step aside. Watching from the side, they could only count the cars. The motorcade was moving with some cargo. Apparently, it was poorly guarded, but the forces of the group

were so small that it could not do anything with the column. The ambush attack could not succeed. And the group missed the convoy, counting 68V trucks. One car from the column stopped and stood on the side of the road. Olga noticed this. The driver began to fiddle, but something went wrong with him, and Buntsev's group saw how a soldier stopped a single car passing by with a red flashlight. "How easy it is to do," Buntsev whispered to Kretova. - It can be seen that there are few partisans here and the enemy is not yet frightened. "Maybe we should try using the red light," Olga suggested. - I think, yes. We have a flashlight, and a German major, -

replied the captain.

We stopped and carefully designed the operation to capture cars.

However, the first car turned out to be a van. Its decided skip. Following the van, judging by the course, a passenger car appeared.

Well, Carl! Show your skill, - clapping friendly on the shoulder, the captain advised the "major" on the implementation of the operation plan.

"He is very hesitantly waving a lantern. He won't stop the car, but only scare him, and then anxiety, chase, "the thought appeared in

partisans.

Olga looked at the commander. He watched Carl closely. The car stopped. The decisive seconds arrived. Karl went to the right door. The light came on in the car. The passengers of the limousine now could not see what was happening around, and the partisans saw those who were riding in a limousine.

When the indignant chief lieutenant opened the door for the presentation of documents, Karl was confused, forgetting that he was in the uniform of a major and said that everything was in order and they could go.

The chief lieutenant of the signal troops saluted, and the car raced forward, carrying away four Nazis who escaped death. Karl felt that the danger had passed. "It's a pity that the passengers slipped away," the radio operator remarked. When everyone calmed down, they heard the sound of an approaching train. Everyone stopped and waited. All three of them had a great desire to see the results of their work. - What is this? Is it really a passenger

one, - the radio operator asked from behind, seeing the lights of the train approaching at high speed to the place of sabotage. "Really, instead of shell explosions,

we will hear the groans of children and women? So it would be better if he passed without derailing," Olga thought. But then the lights of the locomotive jumped

up, and something rattled under it, as if the train began to be pressed. There was a crash of smashed wagons. The technique worked, but everyone was in a depressed mood. Everyone was silent, thinking that instead of hitting the enemy, they made many innocent victims. Suddenly, a white flare soared

into the sky, followed by another, a third. In the light of the rocket fires, they clearly saw the results of their work. The locomotive and several wagons were lying

down a slope, soldiers jumped out of the wagons left on the way, like from wasp nests, and shooting began in the area of the crash. Everyone was heartbroken.

- Hooray! Bombed! Olga shouted. - The best echelon is hard to find. With manpower, but important - in passenger cars, - Buntsev rejoiced.

Well, Carl! Things are going great! Count on your account a dozen or two dead Nazis," said the captain and patted the novice partisan on the shoulder.

Karl stood stunned, either bewildered or preoccupied.

"We should leave soon," he said, pointing in the direction of the train. But it was difficult to walk along the wet, sometimes viscous field, and it was dangerous and also difficult to walk along the road, as we often had to get off the asphalt and hide so that they would not be seen from cars passing along the highway.

"You won't get far on your own two feet," the radio operator explained to the former driver. Impressed by

the destruction of the train, in which the former driver of the Nazi army, dressed in the uniform of a major, was directly involved, Karl changed dramatically. His movements became more confident. He realized that his fate was tightly connected with the fate of the partisans. He began to convince that it was necessary to return to the road, where he would stop

and pick up a single car. Buntsev agreed, and the group went to the highway. No sooner had they reached the

highway than they saw the lights of the dimmed headlights of a lone car.

The captain again explained to Karl the plan of action with a different balance of forces.

Carl stepped aside. The flashlight blinked demandingly, and the car obediently stopped. Doors creaked, lights came on. There were four people in the car again. Only instead of a German chief lieutenant with a driver sat a Hungarian sapper captain.

- What's the
matter? - Verification of
documents! -

Please ... Carl fiddled with the documents in his hands. He was not ordinary, he was major and dealt with a Hungarian officer!

"Please get out of the car," Karl said to the sapper captain. — Is something wrong? the captain was worried. "Get out of the car and follow me," Karl ordered. - Everyone get out. The soldiers will stay near the car.

The Hungarian obediently commanded the soldiers traveling with him to leave car and, crouching down, got out first. The driver turned off the engine. - Fast! Karl ordered.

The driver hurriedly ran around the car
and stood next to
captain.

— Hyundai hoh! Buntsev said, coming out of the
darkness. - But I'm a
company
commander ... - Hyundai hoh! The captain looked around in confusion.
The German major held him at gunpoint. An SS officer with some soldier
raised their machine guns. - Please! the
captain muttered. The soldiers raised their hands before their
commander. They knew: it is better not to
mess with the Germans. You never know! The SS man snatched the
pistol from the captain's holster. A German
soldier was picking up rifles abandoned by the
Hungarians. "But I am in a hurry..." the captain began to stutter. -
Take off your overcoats and tunic! ordered
a woman standing next to an SS
officer. -

Lord! the captain pleaded. - Shut up! We are not to blame for
anything! one of the soldiers said timidly. - For what?

- God! another exclaimed. - God! "No one will shoot you," the
woman said. - Take off the coat! Do not be afraid! "What are we..." said the first soldier. - If
necessary ... He was
already pulling off his tunic. Looking at him, hurried and

rest.

The Germans were whispering
about something. "Brothers," said the major, approaching the Hungarians. "I
am a Hungarian just like you. We do not wish you harm. It's not the Germans with
me. These are

Russians. Do you hear? The
soldiers froze in disbelief. "Look," said the major. He extended his hand to the Hungarians with
cap, on which a red star lit up. — See?

The unclothed soldiers looked at the star as if spellbound. The captain yelled and ran away.
Buntsev was on the alert for this

times... Then the soldiers
believed. - Russians! one said. - Adviye! Comrades! - Go
home! Karl told the soldiers. - Don't go back to your unit. Go away!
"Now you won't come back," one of the
soldiers snapped. He looked at Kretova ripping off her epaulettes. -
How will you return? "Take us with you," said another.
"Better take us with you. "We can't," Carl said. - Disperse. And know:
Hitler

kaput. The Red Army will soon liberate the country. The war is over.
- Let him ask if there is a checkpoint ahead! Buntsev asked Olya.
Hurry! The driver
was the best informed. He stated that the nearest checkpoint is four
kilometers away, and if you drive in the opposite direction, there is a
checkpoint eleven kilometers away. The bridge is being repaired only on
the third kilometer. - Who
repairs? — The
soldiers of our battalion and the local population. - No
Germans? - No.
Buntsev
made the decision without hesitation. -
Take us with you! the Hungarian soldier asked again. - Get
out! Karl said. - You see, everyone will not fit in the car. Go away!
"Where are we like
this!?" - Hide with the peasants.
Go away! — What are they about?
Buntsev asked. "This one really asks to take
him with you," Karl answered. - Nowhere! Buntsev snapped.
But suddenly he lowered the door handle. "Although... What's his
name?" "Laszlo Kish,"
Karl replied. "Let him sit down,"
said Buntsev. They got into the car. -
Touch! - Buntsev ordered
Karl, who sat down for the driver. The car sped along the
road to the east. Four kilometers passed without incident. Nazis in
oncoming cars and

motorcycles did not pay any attention to them. Nobody overtook them. Suddenly, a red light flashed up ahead. It was too late to stop and turn around. Karl turned on the full light and, seeing that the barrier was blocking the road, he began to slow down, preparing for a fight with the controller. He signaled with a familiar hand, demanding to raise the barrier. The watchman jumped up, but Karl attacked him with such selective abuse that the soldier, saluting, stepped away from the limousine and raised the barrier. The car moved smoothly.

Karl, wiping sweat, said to Kretova:

"That's what it means to know the rules and the language." We drove three miles. At the first crossroads, we turned onto the road going southeast, to the direction from where the occasional artillery fire could be heard.

Soon, having left on a hill, we saw a red signal ahead again. - Is it a checkpoint

again? Buntsev whispered. - No. Something different, - said the radio operator. Slowing down, the captain turned on the sidelights and began to observe what was happening near the lantern.

"There's only one soldier here," Laszlo explained. He's pointing a detour.

- What about ahead? — A broken bridge ahead. Work is going on there. "Are we going to get stuck on the detour?" - Our captain was afraid to get stuck ... - Let's go straight! Buntsev decided. "Karl, ask the guards to

open the barrier. The barrier was open. The sentry did not dare to object

to the German major. - Well, now - God save!

Buntsev said. The car moved slowly along the highway, going around hastily sealed craters. Burnt-out trucks littered the slopes. Ours worked! Buntsev

said. - Likho! A river with a broken bridge appeared.

People were crowding around him. One waved a lantern, pointing down the stream.

"There's a floating bridge," Laszlo explained excitedly. - We must go there ...
The floating
bridge was barely noticeable on the black, swollen from the rain
river. The car slid to the bridge, it went under the wheels ...
- Who works here? How many soldiers? Buntsev asked. "Twenty
soldiers under Lieutenant Ferenc and a mobilized population," Laszlo said.
Is there a barrier on the other side? - Yes, sure. Is
there a soldier there too? - Yes. "And
the lieutenant?"
- Hm! If he is here, then he
is
sitting in a tent,
but most likely he has gone to
village to the women," said Laszlo.
"Stop at the barrier," Buntsev ordered Karl. They safely crossed
the river, entered the highway and reached the barrier.

It cost nothing to disarm the sentry. He recognized Laszlo, drew himself up
in front of the German major, and within a minute was standing without a rifle,
speechless and helpless. "Tell the people
that the work is stopped," ordered Buntsev Laszlo. "And tell the soldiers
that
they can disperse. "But... they might not believe..." the
Hungarian hesitated. - They will believe. Order the men to
come to the car without weapons. Our major will talk to them. "I'll go with
you," Carl said. - Let's go ...
The Hungarian soldiers, hailed by Karl and Laszlo,
approached the car with obvious pleasure. Karl announced that the soldiers
could go home. Hungarians

got excited.

Mobilized residents began to run. — Oh, damn!
Buntsev said and got out of the car. The joy of the
Hungarians at the sight of a man in an SS uniform is like a hand
removed. The soldiers retreated from the tall SS man.
- Do not be afraid! shouted Laszlo. - Guys! Do not be afraid! These are
Russian spies! They killed Captain Sexardi! Russians already

Here! You can disperse! -

Wright! roared a soldier. - Wright! Kaput war! Kretova touched Buntsev by the sleeve. - These are sappers ... Do they have explosives? Laszlo immediately replied that there were explosives in the warehouse. "We must take it," said Kretova. - Take everything you can.

Fuses, fuses... Carl!

Carl, talked to Laszlo, he called three friends. We talked. They ran into the darkness. The soldiers still continued to crowd around the car, looking at the Russians, and some, who had recently approached, still could not do anything.

understand.

"Keep your weapons ready," said Kretova. — risky let's do it... it's not possible...

However, the soldiers showed no hostile feelings. Apparently, enough the wars were engulfed. And the locals have already begun to disperse.

Laszlo and his friends brought two boxes of tola, fuses, a circle of oily shiny Fickford cord, and grenades.

"The lieutenant's not here," Laszlo said breathlessly. - Certainly, run into the village.

"He might come when he finds out about the Russians," said Kretova. Let's go, Comrade Captain.

It turned out that Laszlo Kish knew the roads well and, having traveled about three kilometers, Buntsev got on the road leading to the north, where, according to the Hungarian, the area is convenient for the partisans, and they have

their bases there. Not a single car came across. This worried Kretova very much. Where there is no movement, a single car is more noticeable. But then they came to a crossroads. A column passed through it. A nervous tremor ran down the captain's spine. In the column there were anti-aircraft guns with crews for them, vehicles with ammunition. Cars with their worst enemies passed in front of them.

"Olga, didn't they knock us out?" -
Anything is possible.

And they continued to look at the passing cars. On the road, according to all reports, an entire anti-aircraft artillery division of the enemy was passing by, and two Soviet pilots were watching him from the side, shot down by the enemy

aircraft. The forces were unequal, but, looking from the side at the enemy column, they were considering an attack on it.

- Comrade Captain, let's bomb the column. - We were late, it seems, otherwise we would have put charges on the way. However, we have a car, we can overtake. Do one small charge with a short flicker cord, and a couple of large charges with long cords.

And he told her his plan. As

soon as the convoy passed, Buntsev brought the car onto the road, overtook the convoy without difficulty and, having passed a small bridge, abruptly stopped the car, ran out onto the bridge and put on it a flashlight with a red light. The trick was a success: the column stopped, and thus time was won for placing charges ahead of it. Peering around, the ship's commander discovered heaps of rubble. Powerful charges were installed in two of them, and when the column started off, Laszlo ignited the incendiary tubes.

The limousine started off, and when the enemy column, judging by the lights, caught up with the charges, Buntsev ordered a small charge with a short incendiary tube to be thrown onto the road. Ten

seconds later, a flame shot up and an explosion of a small charge was heard, and after it the sounds of large explosions flew to the limousine, but the limousine was already far away and continued to move away from the enemy column, which suffered significant damage.

"That's great, let them remember ours," Olga rejoiced. Violently rejoiced at luck and Laszlo Kish. Buntsev also felt deep satisfaction, only Karl did not show his enthusiasm in any way and even somehow fell silent.

- You something, Carl, quieted down. Or do you feel sorry for the Nazis? Buntsev asked him.

"I don't feel sorry for the Nazis, but I really feel sorry for the drivers,"
he replied.

- Most of all I feel sorry for the innocent children who die in the war, they die only because Hitler and the German imperialists wanted to conquer and destroy other peoples. The sooner the German fascist troops are defeated, the fewer innocent victims there will be, and therefore, Karl, wherever possible, it is necessary to smash the Nazi troops, and the only salvation for everyone who does not want to die

together with the fascist bandits, get away from them and, in order to get rid of the horrors of the war as soon as possible, beat them," Buntsev concluded his speech.

- We had such brave souls who did not want to fight themselves, and persuaded others to do so, but there were others: they reported, and good people died, and the rest were frightened, and already talk about the war was carried out under the slogan "Heil Hitler!" . Only two of my friends, though zealously shouting "heil!", but one wrote "Death to Hitler" and "Down with the war" in some places on the fences, and the other drew caricatures," Laszlo Kish began to tell, but his story was interrupted by the captain. "Look, there's a city ahead," he said. There

was a village ahead. Buntsev stopped the car, and no matter how Karl tried to persuade him, the captain did not dare to drive through the city. He clearly understood that if someone stopped them in the village, they had nowhere to hide, especially since the enemy had probably already learned about their affairs and strengthened the guard. There was no detour. We consulted and decided it was better to abandon the car. Buntsev

turned the car around and, having dispersed it, drove off the road, and it got stuck in the soggy ground.

Chapter 13

In a stone bag

Four partisans armed and loaded with trophy property went into the field, bypassing the city. Half an hour later, we came out onto a passing narrow road paved with gravel and walked along it, having previously cleaned our shoes of dark dirt adhering to them.

The area, heavily crossed by small ravines and streams, reminded the captain of the ravines of his native land - Tulshchina. Here, just look, his native village will appear ... One dream occupied

Buntsev - as soon as possible to his own, deliver documents as soon as possible, otherwise they may lose their value.

We entered a large ravine with exposed edges. On the opposite side, long low buildings and a tall brick chimney were visible against the sky, the top of which had been hit by a shell. There were no signs of people nearby. "An abandoned brick factory," Buntsev immediately identified. At such

a time, no one is up to the brick. And among the bricks you can find a place for a day. Having overcome a steep ascent, they entered the yard, littered with bricks and broken bricks. And here are the bomb craters. It was ours who bombed someone here. There was no other choice, dawn was approaching. We decided

to stop here for a day and started looking for shelter. There were many dark cells in the ruins of the brick factory, but it was necessary to find the most hidden one with an emergency exit, cover the tracks and prevent the enemy from using dogs. After a long search, they hardly entered the preserved chamber, where bricks were once

fired. There was a small hole in the wall through which it was possible to observe what was happening in the yard, but through it it was impossible to see what was happening in the cell. We decided to stay there for the day.

Friends sealed up the entrances with bricks, masked them with dust and settled down for a day. They lit a pocket torch taken by a thrifty radio operator in a captured car. The blue light pleasantly illuminated the uncomfortable shelter, and the soul became lighter.

- Well, now, Olya, let us refresh ourselves from our meager supplies, and we will rest after the labors of the righteous," said the captain.

After a day in the open air, in the rain, they even felt some comfort in a dusty stone box, and the radio operator in an oriental way began to set the "table" on the floor, using the remains of the parachute dome as a tablecloth.

- Eat and drink enough, but the dishes are bad.

We'll have to take turns drinking together," Olga said, pointing to Buntsev's mug and Karl's aluminum glass.

- It would be that, but how - we will manage, - the captain answered. Olya filled the "glasses" from a trophy flask and handed it to Karl and Laszlo, but they refused, and suggested, on the contrary, that the Russians

should be the first to drink. - No, Olya, I can't drink, I'm entering the service. You drink for a safe passage through the front line, but little by little. It's good to drink cognac with a cold and at home, so we'll come to our people, and we'll drink there as it should be," said the captain, returning the filled

mug to Karl. "Look, Comrade Captain, what a teetotaler you have become," said Kretova

jokingly. "I'm not a teetotaler, but I don't drink during my working hours," answered Buntsev. - Yes, are we going to drink now, we will get a little warm, according to 100 grams every day is supposed, - Kretova did not lag behind.

"Here's my rightful portion I'll drink when I get off my post," and the captain gave back the glass. Breakfast went unnoticed. Olga began to clean the "table". Laszlo her

helped.

Dawn broke, but thick fog limited the visibility of everything several tens of meters. Buntsev climbed into the next cell.

The tired partisans prepared to rest in order to gain strength for operations at night. Who undressed, put in order clothes and shoes. Karl managed to shave in the semi-darkness. The

peaceful activities of Captain Buntsev's group in the shelter were disrupted by a sudden cannonade. The distant but strong cannonade alerted everyone.

- Began! Ours are coming! Kretova said.

In the beginning of the cannonade, the characteristic sounds of motorcycle engines were heard, then commands in German were also heard. Turning off the light, everyone involuntarily grabbed their weapons.

A few minutes later, several motorcycles drove into the factory yard. The Nazis parked their cars at the walls of the building, while they themselves fled in all directions. One rushed towards them. Everyone froze, holding their weapons at the ready.

The Nazis who came used the adjacent room as a toilet and thereby disguised and covered them, albeit not entirely pleasant, but with a reliable veil.

When the enemy soldier left, Laszlo grabbed Olga's hand and shook it happily, making it clear that for now the danger had passed. But at that time, from where the damaged brick chimney stood, short, muffled bursts of automatic weapons were heard, followed by a grenade explosion, again grenades, and then the loud nasal voices of the Nazis. All four asked themselves the same question: what happened? They felt that something bad had happened.

Ignoring the danger, Karl went to a littered pothole in the outer wall and began to listen through the crack to what was happening on the territory of the plant. And he heard terrible news: "Zwei Russisch Soldaten Kaput,"

Karl said sadly and quietly and began to explain that, as he learned from the conversations of the Nazis, two Russian reconnaissance soldiers used a dilapidated pipe as an observation post, had a radio station and informed them about the enemy. "That's who they were looking for: scouts, not us," thought

Buntsev. Everyone honored the memory of the fallen heroes in silence and swore in their hearts to take revenge on the hated Nazis for the death of fearless soldiers. In the ensuing silence, Buntsev and his comrades heard the

ever-increasing rumble of Soviet aircraft engines and no longer felt alone. None of them had the idea that their own aircraft could drop bombs and get into the room where they were hiding. The Nazis feared that the Soviet intelligence officers called the aircraft on themselves, and therefore, having heard the

rumble of approaching Soviet aircraft, they ran to hide in pits outside the factory. All

four felt a clear relief and confidence in the successful outcome of their day. But Soviet bombers only flew over the plant to carry out their combat missions deep behind enemy lines. Half an hour after the rumble of the planes died

down somewhere in the distance, the Nazis again appeared in the courtyard of the brick factory, and this time not only on motorcycles, but also on cars and tractors. German speech was almost continuously heard through the growing cannonade. But this time the partisans felt much more confident than when the enemy unit first appeared at the plant.

But no matter how sleepy all four were, despite Buntsev's suggestion, not one of them could fall asleep for a long time. Everyone was waiting for

new troubles. In the afternoon, the radio operator was the first to fall asleep, soon Karl fell asleep too. Laszlo also allowed Buntsev to sleep, and he himself was left alone to stay awake, although he was steadily falling asleep. When the captain let others rest and could no longer resist drowsiness himself, he woke up Karl and Olga and left them to serve, warning the radio operator that in no case should he be left alone to stay awake. Despite all the screams of the Germans in the yard, the clang of caterpillars, the close

explosions of shells, Buntsev immediately fell asleep. The sleepy Karl was drawn to sleep, but Olga did not violate the captain's instructions, and as soon as Karl began to fall asleep, she woke him up so as not to be left alone. When

Laszlo woke up, the "major" fell asleep, and she was on duty alone with a young Hungarian. Toward evening,

Kretova and Laszlo heard close, booming cannon shots not from the front, but from the rear. As soon as dusk fell, Kretova carefully opened the gap and began to observe. Ahead, to the east, the city was visible, illuminated by numerous fires. Behind,

behind the brick factory, close-range gunshots were heard. Buntsev woke up, began to study the situation. At this time, the battery again fired several shells at our troops.

"Interesting," he thought, "we are ahead of the enemy artillery. Behind us is a whole battery, and we are probably between the artillery and infantry of the enemy. Great, so the Germans draped in a day.

“Comrade Captain,” Olga asked anxiously, “we seem to have found ourselves under the nose of the German artillery. Ours are now probably very close? And she

told what she saw and heard. “This will obviously be our last night behind enemy lines. It must be carried out in such a way that each of our actions is a blow to the enemy,” thought Buntsev.

They ate quickly. A dark autumn night has come. Artillery fire ceased. Unforgettable sounds of engines grew in the air - the masters of the night expanses, the tireless U-2s.

Chapter

14 The Last Night

Daytime rest and a joyful feeling of the closeness of their troops lifted everyone's spirits.

In complete darkness, brick by brick, they began to dismantle the entrance to the next room, which was littered with them. They managed to make a hole without much noise, but when they began to crawl out, Karl accidentally fell to the floor along with several bricks, and a treacherous roar was

heard throughout the building. Everyone froze, waiting for possible trouble. But the enemy soldiers who were nearby either did not guess the cause of the roar, or did not hear it and continued to go about their business. After waiting 3-4 minutes, the captain led the group between the stacks of bricks into the yard, and when not a single Nazi was visible nearby, they quickly crossed the empty yard and carefully began to move away from the ill-fated plant. Buntsev

and his partisans felt free again, and everything they had experienced during what seemed to them a long day was behind them. Ahead, in the east, in the city, numerous glows of fires could be seen, and from there came a continuous cannonade. Dripped small rain. Car

engines rumbled from the direction of the brick factory. Commands and hurried conversations were heard.

"It's probably the artillery that's going to drizzle," she said. Kreto's suggestion. They

went along the country road known to them. At the first crossroads on the road leading to the city, they saw a sign with the inscription: "Akhtung! Achtung, di minen! Di Minen!" On the side there was a pole with a pointer, on the arrow of which was the name of the settlement and a cat was drawn. There was a

clanging sound from behind. Buntsev, like recollecting himself, he pulled out the peg.

- Olga! Faster. What are you worth?

Kretova understood what was happening and quickly dragged the peg with the signs to the other side. They pulled out the pointer arrow and set it in a new direction. Now the unmined area has been marked as mined.

Having done their work, they went along the road, and behind them the roar of engines and the clang of tracks

of gun tractors grew. - Stop! Let's see where they go,"

said Buntsev. The cars stopped at the fork. Through the roar of engines, German abuse could be heard. After consulting, the Nazis apparently came to an agreement. Again there was the clang of caterpillars and the rumble of engines. Suddenly, breaking the silence of the night, a flame shot up high. A large explosion shook the air. The group stopped.

"Gotcha, darlings, you won't drive at night," the radio operator shook her fist.

Soon, one after another, there were two more muffled explosions. "Boon, boon," Laszlo said happily, pointing in the direction

of the explosions. "Let's go out to the big highway - there we won't do such things yet," Olga rejoiced. A few

minutes later we approached the main highway and lay down. There was almost no traffic on the road. But from the side of the front, several lights appeared. Soon a convoy of trucks and cars, covered in front and behind by armored personnel carriers, passed by the group. "They're ticking, you

bastards," whispered Olga. The

rumble of Soviet aviation appeared in the air and quickly grew.

"Now our people will give them something to drink," she added,

peering up at the sky. The enemy column was moving without side guards. At times, overtaking the column, motorcyclists and cars rushed by at high speed.

None of them suspected that Soviet soldiers and their friends were not far from the road. They saw how the Nazis retreated to new defensive lines, from where they had to be driven out again, but so far they could only observe and record. Buntsev wrote down the time, the composition of the passing column. No sooner had one column escaped than another followed. Empty men walked towards her

cars - maybe in order to take out the stolen property. Every now and then, connected motorcyclists scurried from city to city.

Do ours know about the retreat of the enemy that has begun? And if they don't know, how do you tell them? After all, his group can neither stop the flow of cars, nor inflict a sensitive blow on it. She is too small for this and not adapted. "Comrades," whispered

Laszlo. And he began to show with gestures that it was necessary to go to the city and shoot at the enemies there, and in the morning to hide and wait for the enemy to withdraw.

— No, Laszlo, you should not climb into a strange, unfamiliar city. We need space to move freely. Although there is panic in the city, we can be shot down not only by the Nazis, but also by our own. The uniform of one is German, the other is Hungarian. We do not know the password. We do not speak German. In general, we shouldn't meddle there," Buntsev concluded his thought.

Everyone agreed with the irrefutable arguments of the captain. The rumble of the engines of Soviet aircraft was growing. Night bombers passed along the road to the head of the convoy and there they heard deaf explosions of air bombs. The clouds lit up with bloody fires. Tankers and gasoline were burning, ammunition trucks were exploding. Searchlight beams streaked the low clouds, numerous bullet and shell paths plowed the air spaces. Buntsev's group watched with admiration the actions

Soviet falcons.

The automobile convoy, which had not yet been hit by our aircraft, apparently, on someone's orders, began to turn onto a country road, and individual cars rushed forward towards the glow of the fire. It was as if U-2s were patrolling over the highway. Soon the traffic on the road stopped, and if it were not for the artillery and mortar skirmish somewhere east of the city, one would think that the front line was already far behind.

"What to do," Buntsev decided, still admiring the actions of the night bombers, "where to go to look for a site for crossing the front?"

Finally, the car column passed by the group and the armored car that was closing it disappeared from sight. Buntsev, wasting no time, picked up the group, and they almost ran across the road.

Now the way to the east was clear. But, having crossed the road, the captain noticed a lone wagon on it, traveling from the direction of the city. He had the idea of capturing her and thus to some extent making up for the unpleasant impression, dissatisfaction, inactivity during the ^{caused} passage of the column. "This is just a

happy find. We need languages and guides so badly, but here they go into our hands. Do not capture a lonely cart at night! This is where the enemy's uniform will come in handy," thought Buntsev, looking at Karl, dressed in the uniform of a major.

The captain led the group almost at a run back to the road, explaining what was happening along the way. A lone wagon trotted towards the group that had come onto the road. Buntsev was afraid that they would not be disturbed, and urged Karl to go faster towards the cart.

As soon as the major caught up with the cart, he stopped it and ordered the three German soldiers riding on it to show their documents. When they got them out, Buntsev with a group seemed to emerge from the darkness and commanded in a stencilled way: -

Hyundai hoh!

Three soldiers, seeing the machine guns pointed at them, dutifully raised their

hands. - Olga! Quickly connect them together, do not spare the wires - a whole cartload

of them. Kretova and Laszlo quickly dealt with the frightened soldiers. Buntsev got into the cart and drove the horses away from the road. Following him, the partisans led the prisoners.

We stopped about 150 meters from the road and began interrogating the "tongues". The captured soldiers turned out to be signalmen. They removed the field wires and went to the unit.

Laszlo and Karl questioned them in detail about the situation at the front, trying to find out where it was safest to cross the front line. Kretova busied herself

with inspecting the wagon, dropping coils from wires.

- Olga! You leave a couple of coils just in case, but don't accidentally throw away the right tool. "Be calm, comrade captain, I won't drop anything you need. Look, the signalers are armed to the teeth: three machine guns, eight grenades. Having finished

interrogating the prisoners, the group learned that the enemy was retreating, and Soviet troops would soon come here. The prisoners said that the enemy troops retreated only along the roads. His troops are close, and therefore Buntsev decided to lead the

"languages" with him. So that the prisoners would have less incentive to escape, he decided to repeat the operation to turn the Nazis into Germans. - Olya,

bring the prisoners in civilian form. And Kretova began to process them. The German soldiers were very dissatisfied with the tailoring work of the radio operator, but the Laszlo machine gun aimed at the prisoners reminded them of the need to obey. Olga, like an experienced theatrical costume designer, quickly "demobilized" the German soldiers, and they looked like dervishes. For reliability, they were firmly tied with wire to each other. Now they no longer had the opportunity to scatter, and there was nothing to run away - the Gestapo would crack down anyway.

"Well, what a good-natured people we Russian people are," Buntsev reasoned to himself, looking at the prisoners. "Three enemy soldiers have been caught, and there is no harm from us. And how they mock our soldiers who were taken prisoner! Maybe these three killed civilians, and now they are vying with each other trying to answer, trembling with fear for their lives. How they do not look like prisoners of the first year of the war. How our victories repulsed their arrogance, weaned them from campaigns for living space.

And Buntsev remembered that even at the beginning of 1908, Lenin pointed out that "partisan actions are not revenge, but military actions." And indeed, maybe these three Germans, having settled in the signal troops, really already hate Hitler, who interrupted their peaceful life. Maybe these Germans will turn out to be real people and they will fight against the Nazis together with us.

Car lights appeared on the road in the distance. Buntsev led his group towards the highway. They walked across a wet plowed field.

The horses pulled the heavy cart with difficulty. Olga got tired of urging the exhausted horses, and she jumped off the wagon. I had to straighten the horses and use them as riding. Buntsev wanted to put a radio operator on one, but she preferred to walk. All the necessary trophy property was loaded onto the prisoners.

Leaving the wagon in place, the group moved on. Captain Buntsev rode ahead, followed by captive soldiers, bound together, loaded with cartridges, machine guns without disks, coils of wires, tools, and behind them were Kretova and Karl, the procession was brought up by Laszlo on another horse.

"It's not for you to ride horses on your collective farm. That way they can be discovered from afar, and you won't get anywhere on this clumsy heavy bityug," Buntsev soon thought and got off his

horse. Laszlo followed him. They left the horses. Maybe they will be preserved and then useful in the household, the captain thought, frightening the standing bityugs.

We walked along the impassability, drenched in sweat, exerting all our strength, not paying attention to either the mud or the light rain. Buntsev and his comrades knew that they were moving slowly and that time was running fast. They were frightened by the prospect of staying a day behind enemy lines in close proximity to the front line. At stops, listening to the skirmish, Buntsev asked the prisoners the direction of movement, and the group walked again. But on their way they met a stream about 4–5 meters wide that had spilled from continuous rains and stopped.

- It's worse than the road. Here you can't wait until the water passes, you can't jump over, and you can't see the crossbars

near. "Now horses would come in handy," Kretova said sadly, looking first at the muddy water, then at the prisoners, and they showed that the stream was small - knee-deep.

- Not the Volga during the ice drift, but a stream. If necessary, we will bathe, and we will pass. Well, in the meantime, we still have time, let's go along the stream, maybe we'll find a suitable ford or some abandoned bridge. You, Olga, give us a piece from the emergency reserve, Buntsev suggested to her in conclusion.

Before Laszlo and Karl had time to ask the prisoners about the stream and the possibilities of crossing it, Kretova had already cut and gave everyone

a small piece of good-quality bacon and a small slice of stale bread. From the interrogations of the prisoners,

Laszlo learned that there was a bridge not far downstream, on a small country road, it might be possible to cross it when there was no movement. The bridge, according to the stories of the prisoners, is not guarded by anyone. — Comrade captain, why should we look for bridges. Let's get on the leash

let one Fritz in and let him measure, since they brought us here.

“Look, Comrade Kretova, how ruthless you are. There is no need to bathe the Fritz in cold water, they carry the load for us. And Buntsev led the group downstream, as recommended

prisoners.

— Comrade Captain! Maybe the Fritz are deliberately directing us into a trap, the further we go downstream, the more water in the stream, and suddenly the bridge will be guarded, and they will yell when we get closer to it. “Look the wrong way!” If we go up, we will again approach the main road, and on it even a

small bridge can be heavily guarded. The farther we go from the main road, the fewer troops we will have at the front in such mud, and it will be easier to go over to our own. As for the trap, you need to look both ways.

Having passed a little, we heard the rumble of engines and the clang of caterpillars ahead and

to the right. "Here, bastards, they're walking without lights, which means they're trying to escape unnoticed," thought the captain.

Judging by the hum of the engines, Buntsev determined that the convoy was moving slowly, perhaps due to poor road conditions. When the group

approached the bridge about two hundred meters, the captain stopped her.

- Well, here we are. There are no fewer cars here than on the main road, Kretova whispered to the captain. And, looking angrily at the prisoners, she added: she would still have to force them to look for a ford.

Don't worry, Olga! You hear how the shooting is approaching, maybe the last Nazis are retreating along the bridge! But take care of the prisoners: now they can let us down. I'll have to put it on the ground, and put gags in my mouth so that they don't shout.

No matter how the prisoners proved that they would neither scream nor run, Buntsev this time turned out to be inexorable, and they were laid on the ground with their hands and feet tied, with gags in their mouths. Leaving Kretova and Laszlo with them, Buntsev and Karl went on reconnaissance to the bridge.

"Well, dregs. The stream is small, and the bridge is large, taking into account the spill stream in high water, and even guarded," thought Buntsev.

At the entrance to the eastern shore of the structure, twin sentries walked around, and their silhouettes were visible against the sky when they were not covered by vehicles, tractors and guns. Artillery units apparently retreated along the bridge, observing the strictest light and sound camouflage: the vehicles were moving with the lights completely turned off, the soldiers on the vehicles and guns did not betray their presence in any way.

Zorky Buntsev pushed Karl, pointing out to him the soldiers he had noticed under the bridge span. Upon careful observation, the captain noticed that the soldiers were burying something. A suspicion arose in his head - maybe the bastards want to blow up the bridge.

And, as if to confirm this thought, he noticed two more soldiers who approached the object and unwound something.

"The wires are failing, they think to blow up as soon as their will miss."

In Buntsev's imagination, the possible consequences arose: forward Soviet units approaching the enemy, and in front of them the bridge flies into the air and the enemy breaks off. But there may be an even more unpleasant option: Soviet tanks, carried away by the pursuit of the enemy, burst onto the bridge and take off into the air with him, the units following them are showered with a hail of stones and concrete. "No, we won't let you blow up the bridge," Buntsev decided.

Apparently, having finished the work, the soldiers came out from under the bridge and four of them began to move away from where they had just stretched the wires, two remained on the road directly near the object.

"It is impossible, downright criminal, to be near the bridge and let the enemy blow it up after the withdrawal of enemy troops, and even, perhaps, when our advanced units approach it. No and no! It's better to die yourself, but not to let the enemy blow up the bridge," Buntsev decided.

“But how not to blow up? It is unlikely to approach the wire laid along the road unnoticed, and even if there are soldiers left near the bridge.

Well, what if you can cut the wires? They will find the break, fix it, or detonate the charge in some other way. Short circuit wires? But again they can notice a short circuit and eliminate it. They are not so bad as not to foresee the possibility of damage to the wires. And he had a new idea - to blow up the bridge himself. Not such a large stream and not such an important structure, and ours can quickly build a temporary crossing.

“Where would it be more useful,” he thought, “to blow up the bridge under the passing enemy vehicles and prevent him from withdrawing equipment and getting out from under the blow of our

troops.” Having made a decision, Buntsev hurried to his group. All approaching shell explosions. Returning, the captain began to select for himself everything necessary for the operation he had conceived: an incomplete coil of wire, wire cutters, a couple of fuses for grenades.

What are you thinking, Comrade Captain? Maybe we can still cross the stream with the help of the Fritz, and we'll go as soon as possible to his.

“We can always cross, Olga, but now the point is not to cross ourselves, but to prevent the Nazis from taking their equipment across the stream over the bridge and thereby help their troops. Here, comrade Kretova, are all my documents. And here are the documents of the enemy. Just in case, be ready to deliver them to your own. Now, without any noise, move away from the bridge for another two hundred meters and wait for me, and if I linger after the explosion for more than a quarter of an hour, act on your own.

— Comrade Captain! Don't go alone! I will go with you! Karl and Laszlo with the prisoners will step back and wait for

us. “No, Olga, it's easier to get close alone, and so as not to waste my time, you yourself will explain everything to our friends when you move another two hundred meters from the bridge. Now wish me luck and I'll go.

Karl and Laszlo, having learned that Buntsev was going to the bridge, and realizing that he was going to go alone, strongly protested. Buntsev had to yield and take Karl with him.

“You didn't take me like that, but you take Karl,” Kretova was offended.

"But he might overhear something important that neither you nor I can not.

It was drizzling a little rain. The autumn night was so dark that, after walking five steps, Buntsev could no longer see the rest of the group. All the approaching explosions of mines and shells, of

friendly troops, enemy artillery fire drowned out any extraneous noise and even the rumble of engines on the road. Buntsev and Karl, bending down, walked along the stream to the bridge. It seemed to the captain that too much time had passed from the moment they left, when they finally approached the object at such a distance that the vehicles moving along the bridge and the guns attached to them became clearly visible from below. Buntsev and Karl lay down in a wet hollow. The bridge was now guarded not by two, but by four soldiers. They were located 10-12 meters from the object, and, as it seemed to the captain, the sentries could clearly see not only what was happening on the bridge, but also near it. But Buntsev was wrong. Standing on the road, the German soldiers, getting used to the darkness, really saw well what was happening on the bridge and on the road on the approaches to it, but, being at the top, they did not see anything that was happening below, in the floodplain of the stream, and they did not special need to monitor the floodplain of the stream, which, on the approach to the bridge from the east, was tightly blocked by anti-personnel mines, the presence of which the captain did not even know.

Having overestimated the enemy's ability to observe the floodplain, Buntsev decided to get to the bridge alone. Karl did not agree to let him go alone, but he found a way out, leaving him his fur jacket. Taking with him a coil of wire with checks of grenade fuses tied to it, the captain crawled to the bridge. The closer Buntsev crawled to the charge, the stronger his heart beat. He could already clearly hear the conversations of the Germans on the bridge, but it was impossible to stop, he

in a hurry.

All his actions were aimed at getting to the bridge unnoticed. Finding himself under the bridge, the captain listened for several seconds, peered into the darkness, and, not finding anything suspicious, began to grope for the wires and the charge. The weak, previously imperceptible wind now became unbearable. Chilling from the cold, the captain felt for two wires and, finding a charge on them, pulled them out and inserted the grenade fuse. Now miners

the enemy could not let him into the air along with the bridge. And along the bridge, rumbling, cars left, taking away guns.

Having strengthened the fuse, Buntsev began to carefully crawl away. Karl was waiting for his boss and friend, and as soon as Buntsev crawled up to him, he gave him a flask of cognac. The captain drank a few sips greedily, put on his jacket, and together they crawled about fifty meters from the bridge. Having unwound the second coil of wire, they stopped. Judging by the rumble, the enemy was still retreating across the bridge. Friends lay down over the hill.

"Enough, otherwise they will leave," thought the captain and pulled the wire, with looking in awe towards the bridge, fearing that the fuse would fail.

There was no explosion. The captain began frantically to choose the wire further. Suddenly, a huge

column of fire erupted, then there was a deafening explosion, and the debris of the bridge, along with the gun, flew into the air. Concrete, stones and metal fell to the ground with hissing and squealing. Several fragments fell nearby, splashing the captain and his assistant with earth. When the fall of debris and fragments stopped, Buntsev and Karl shook hands in joyful excitement. Karl again took out a flask and, opening the cork, gave it to Buntsev, who drank several large sips of cognac, and they went to the group.

Following the captain's instructions, Kretova began to take the prisoners back, quietly moving away from the bridge. Having passed about one hundred and fifty meters, the group stopped in a hollow. When the flame of the explosion shot up, Kretova's heart beat with joy. She was glad that the escape route of the enemy's equipment was cut off, but at the same time she worried about the fate of the performers. And Kretova peered into the darkness, waiting for Buntsev to appear. Suddenly,

in the area of the former bridge, as it seemed to the radio operator, there was a grenade explosion. The heart skipped a beat. But no shooting, and one after the other two more grenade explosions.

"What does it mean?" thought Laszlo and Kretova, peering into the darkness, to where the bridge had been. It

seemed that a lot of time had passed, but Buntsev and Karl were still not there. Finally, the radio operator heard steps and, straining all her attention, all her will, soon saw a person so dear to him. Overjoyed, Olga rushed forward, and such a touching meeting took place between her and the captain, just like Buntsev

arrived not after a dangerous operation just completed, but after a long separation. "Just

drink some wine and warm up. Now you can't refuse. And Olya gave him a flask of wine. The captain took a few sips and passed them to Karl.

The destruction of a small bridge during the passage of the batteries of the retreating German infantry regiment over it dramatically changed the situation in the area where the Buntsev

group was located. According to the plan, at night the German infantry regiment was to withdraw to the western bank of the nameless stream, to gain a foothold on it by dawn, destroying the bridge, and to prevent its restoration with artillery and mortar fire. The premature explosion of the bridge, and even with significant losses for the enemy, overturned all his plans. As a result of the explosion of a large charge, the battery passing over the bridge was almost completely destroyed. Two battalions with all means of reinforcement were cut off. The enemy did not have time to restore the bridge across the stream. It was impossible to move off-road on the ground saturated with water from the autumn rains. The Germans decided to use the last opportunity and save part of the cut off equipment by transporting it over an impromptu bridge, which they decided to build where a dirt road passed through the stream, sending a detachment of sappers and an infantry platoon for this purpose.

Having learned about a strong explosion behind enemy lines, in the area where there was a bridge across the stream, the commander of the advancing rifle regiment of the Soviet Army, Colonel Mitrofanov, assuming that one of the vehicles with ammunition exploded, ordered to intensify artillery shelling

of the bridge area. Despite the soggy sticky ground, noticing the retreat enemy, the Soviet units began to pursue him. Artillery

shelling of the bridge area began. Some shells whistled overhead, others exploded between the group and

bridge.

— Comrade Captain! Let's go away from the bridge, yeah across the stream to her own," Kretova suggested.

But he did not have time to answer. Twenty meters to the right exploded the shell and fragments whistled over the lying group.

- Behind me! Buntsev commanded, and everyone rushed to fresh funnel and lay down in it.

The cloying smell of exploding TNT wafted through the funnel. The captain ordered the captive helmet and two bowlers to quickly clear the funnel from loose soil.

- Now, Olya, we will wait for our own. "And if dawn catches us here," the radio operator asked frightened. - Look! Look! You see

these bright wavering, then flashing, then disappearing lights. These are our tanks.

The shells howled a little to the side and burst from the side, from behind. The gunfire was getting closer. It was definitely dawn. "If our people don't come up to the stream and force it,"

Buntsev thought, "then it's all over." Go forward to the advancing was already late.

The funnel cleared of loose soil was prepared for defense. When the artillery fire almost

stopped and was moved deep into the enemy defenses, Buntsev and his group heard a distant Russian "Hurrah!" Leaning out from behind the parapet, they saw the retreating lines of the enemy and the Soviet units pursuing them ahead of the stream. Three tanks burst forward and went to the destroyed bridge, but then a flame shot up under one, there was a dull explosion, and the tank, shuddering, stopped. Buntsev saw how, near a platoon of Germans, breaking away under the cover of slowly retreating chains, they headed for the stream, apparently trying to reach the western, command bank.

Goosebumps ran down Buntsev's back from excitement. On them a whole platoon of the enemy was advancing with machine guns and mortars.

- Olga! Laszlo! - he showed them a platoon approaching the stream. "It would also be nice to make Karl shoot," the captain thought. but the damned Austrian will again begin to offer to do without a fight. He showed Karl to keep an eye on the prisoners. From the funnel where the Buntsev group was located, to the Nazis less than 100 meters left. Olga and Laszlo burned with impatience.

"Comrade Captain, let me cut," the radio operator whispered. - Hush, wait for the command.

Approaching the stream, the enemy platoon rushed into the water. When most of them had already crossed and the rest entered the stream, Buntsev gave a long line. Olga and Laszlo followed him. Wet Nazis swept along the shore under the destructive fire of three machine guns. Some of them remained in the stream. Only a dozen surviving Nazis managed to escape to the side and lie down behind a hillock, leaving a mortar and two machine guns and about half a dozen dead and wounded. Now the retreating chain of the German company could no longer count on support from the western bank. The Nazis began to hastily retreat to the remnants of their platoon, which hid from Buntsev's group behind a hillock and from there entered into a firefight with it. Seeing the confusion and firing behind enemy lines, the advancing Soviet rifle company, under the command of Captain Yegorov, shouted "Hurrah!" rushed to pursue the enemy.

"Hurrah," Buntsev and Kretova shouted like an echo in response - their supported Laszlo, but immediately grabbed his chest and found blood.

He was handed over to Karl for assistance. Having no effective support from the rear, the thinned enemy chain threw down her weapon and raised her hands up. The

remnants of the German platoon that crossed to the western coast began to crawl away, trying to get away from the coast as soon as possible, but their noticed.

"They're leaking, you bastards," whispered Olga, pointing at the two hundred meters of the Germans.

The automatic fire of Buntsev's thinned group nevertheless forced the Nazis to reduce their ardor and lay low. They were pursued by Soviet units. Having crossed the ford, they appeared in front of the funnel occupied by Buntsev's group. The captain and Kretova rushed to meet them.

Seeing a radio operator in a cap with a red star and Captain Buntsev in his leather jacket, and with him a wounded Hungarian soldier, a red-haired German in an officer's overcoat, with a machine gun, but without a headgear, which the quick-witted Karl took off in a timely manner, and three tattered ones, one of which was wounded in the leg, the squad leader, an elderly sergeant, who fought from the foothills of the Caucasus to

the Hungarian plain, was at a loss for a second - he had never seen such a picture, and then he asked:

How did you get here before us?

Chapter

15 An Unforgettable Encounter

Toward evening, Temkin and Dobryakov heard a noise - someone was walking, and not alone. They got worried. And between the bushes they saw armed men. Friends were stunned when they heard Russian speech.

- Yes, these are our partisans! Dobryakov exclaimed. - Yes exactly! Temkin confirmed. They rushed towards them. Seeing people running towards them, the partisans stopped. One of he exclaimed:
"Tolya, is that you?" Where are you from? - It's a long story. Where are you from? - We are from the Volyansky unit. We are making a raid on Hungary. Soon commander Volyansky himself came up. He recognized Dobryakov, whom he knew when he was delivering goods to him. Friends joyfully rushed into each other's arms.
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